

Challenge continues at RHS

Bullies cried and the bullied hugged their aggressors.

For three days in March at Richmond High School, the scenario played itself out again and again.

"I expected a lot more people to be embarrassed to actually be open and s tuff," RHS senior Zach Perkins said. "At the e nd of the day, everyone was hugging each other and caring for each other."

But students say bringing the national bullying prevention event, Challenge Day, to their school might have caused a culture change after a fight began outside Leslie Bolser's classroom last December.

"Most of us that are in that class have either been bullied or have been a bully," junior Takeisha Foust said. "We decided it's not good to be fighting all the time. We were ready to bring Challenge Day here this year and we were excited because we've never had this before, even in Indiana, we've never had it."

And so hundreds of the school's students petitioned the community to sponsor them and raise funds to quickly bring leaders of the award-winning organization to Richmond with the goal of making their school safer and more inviting. The program, which includes six hours of

instruction, pre-program coaching and unlimited phone consultation, costs an average of \$3,200.

RHS students raised the funds themselves by gaining support from numerous public and private groups and individuals, including Youth As Resources and the Women's Fund at the Wayne County Foundation.

The effects of the event, which took place from March 13-15, have been immediate, Foust says.

"I've noticed that people have become closer because during Challenge Day they got to know other people that they didn't know before," she said. "I see a lot of people walk down the hallway that I've never seen together before. So there's a lot of different connections with people that have never even talked before Challenge Day."

In the end, more than 300 students and 70 community volunteers participated in the

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program's emotionally charged workshops, which are designed to break down barriers and promote school and community environments based in understanding, acceptance and love.

"The enthusiasm was equal to or higher as we've seen with the kids," Bolser said of the adults who participated.

Bolser said students will be meeting regularly during the remaining of the school year to plan for future Challenge Day events next year. The goal is to reach more of the school's thousand-plus students and possibly expand the program into Richmond's intermediate schools.

"Some of the ideas were very exciting, and kids have been speaking with me about their ideas, which tells me they have passion," Bolser said.

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To learn more about the work of Challenge Day, visit www.challengeday.org.

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