

## **Laramie school district tries bullying ombudsman**

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — The largest school district in Wyoming is trying a novel approach to dealing with bullying issues.

Laramie County School District 1 is using an ombudsman to help school administrators, parents and students resolve differences and communication problems that can arise in such cases.

The district has contracted with Marvin Nash, who founded an anti-bullying program called Bullying Hurts, to act as an impartial third party in disputes.

The effort is being tried on a pilot basis, with the contract that can pay Nash up to \$10,000 expiring on Feb. 24.

District Superintendent Mark Stock said Tuesday the tactic has proved successful so far, but no decision has been made on whether to continue the program.

“It’s not something that we’re doing widespread, but we’ve got a handful of parents who have taken advantage of that, and it’s gone well actually,” Stock said.

Nash said that he believes the idea might be used elsewhere if it proves successful in Cheyenne.

“Everybody’s going to get to the point where they say we can’t sue our way out of this thing or it has to be a change in the attitude and a change in the approach,” he said.

Nash said his job is to provide better communication between all parties involved in bullying cases, with the goal of helping students feel safe in school.

In many bullying cases, the parents of students involved and school officials have different perceptions of what is happening, he said.

Stock said schools have been dealing with bullies and imposing consequences on them for a long time but have not done so well in communicating with bullying victims and their parents because of time and privacy issues.

“Just because you consequence the bully doesn’t necessarily mean that the family of the victim knows what’s going on and feels safer and feels like the school is doing its part,” Stock said.

An ombudsman can help greatly in that regard, he said.

Nash said he takes the time to meet with parents and students outside the school campus and with school officials about each case to get their side.

Stock said parents must sign a document allowing the district to share information with Nash about any incident.

Either a parent or the district can contact Nash, who works with both sides to identify what the bullying problem is, notify everyone involved about what is happening, then come up with a plan that involves the parents, school, victim and bully.

Even though he is being paid by the school district, Nash said he will maintain his “cowboy independence” in each case.

“You may be signing the check, but we’re still going to do what’s right,” he said. “We act on behalf of the kids. We act on behalf of what we can do to make the kids safe and feel safe.”

Nash said he’s been involved with a number of school bullying cases already — six new ones in the past 10 days — that range in severity from child antics in second grade to physical attacks in high school.

[http://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming/laramie-school-district-tries-bullying-ombudsman/article\\_af1e41d8-1270-511a-a8ea-20c8d834aa45.html](http://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming/laramie-school-district-tries-bullying-ombudsman/article_af1e41d8-1270-511a-a8ea-20c8d834aa45.html)