

Danbury students 'Start with Hello' this school year

The Danbury Public Schools will be implementing two programs this school year designed to create a safer, healthier school climate – and maybe even save student lives.

Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of DPS and President of the Connecticut Association of Public Schools Superintendents, has implemented “Say Something” and “Start with Hello,” programs from Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) that focus on preventing violence, suicide and fear-inducing threats before they happen.

Danbury High School will kick off “Say Something” with a live video stream on Sept. 15 in preparation the week of Oct. 19 call-to-action. “Say Something” instructs students in grades six through 12 how to look for warning signs, signals and threats, particularly in social media, from an individual who may be threatening to hurt themselves or others and to say something to a trusted adult to get help.

“While schools remain one of the safest places for young people within our communities, we are not immune to violence, suicides and threats,” said Pascarella. “While no one program can fix the violence and resulting school safety and climate issues we all face, programs like Say Something and Start with Hello will help us make progress.”

“Start with Hello” addresses social isolation, a growing epidemic in our schools and across the country and refers to the overwhelming feeling of being left out, lonely and treated as being invisible. Research supports that excessive feelings of isolation can be associated with violent and suicidal behavior. This program teaches students in grades two through 12 skill necessary to reach out and include those who may be dealing with chronic isolation. It empowers students to create a culture of inclusion and connectedness within their school.

Pascarella has also encouraged implementation of the programs at schools across Connecticut. School district are also invited to join statewide Call-to-Action weeks where schools from all over the country come together to educate students and communities. “Start with Hello” call-to-action week begins Jan. 25, 2016. He said the programs are easy to implement through flexible classroom format, school assembly or by student ambassadors. The programs can also be incorporated into an existing student club or by creating a new club that focuses on community kindness and safety.

Schools will have access to ongoing SHP trainings and digital access to programs, resources and materials.