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Power of the pledge

Anti-violence campaign empowers pupils

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Quentin Elementary School pupils recite two pledges in the morning, one for the flag and one for themselves.

The latter expresses a reminder for pupils to live a nonviolent life.

"I will not use my hands or my words for hurting myself or others," the pledge reads.

It's at the crux of a national campaign to eliminate abuse and violence, school counselor Vangela Lampee said. She introduced Hands & Words Are Not For Hurting to the school after witnessing its success in Oregon, where the project was founded in 1997.

"I think this message can be taught to anyone. We needed a positive behavior program," Lampee said.

The school, at Avondale Boulevard and Whyman Avenue in Avondale, has embraced the cause.

A wall along the main corridor is nearly overpowered by tiny purple hands holding red hearts - the national symbol for the cause. Each hand represents a community member or pupil who has taken the pledge.

"It's so easy. The kids get it. The people get it. It isn't a goofy pledge. There's a very



SALENA URQUIDEZ, left, Sir Darrell-Bridges and Emily Long, fifth-graders at Quentin Elementary School, show that they have made the Hands & Words Are Not For Hurting pledge.

serious meaning behind it," Lampee said.

Fifth-grade pupil Salena Urquidez, 11, takes the message to heart.

"We want this world to be better. We're making a promise to not use violence," she said.

Her classmate, Sir Darrell-Bridges, 11, has asked his immediate family members and cousins to support him in creating a peaceful environment not only at school but at home, too.

"People were using negative words toward each other," he said about conditions at the school. "First there would be verbal fights and then it would turn physical."

Lampee said violent behavior has never been a severe issue at the school but Hands & Words Are Not For Hurting ingrains a nonviolent behavior into youths so that it will be carried forward into adulthood.

"It takes time for any change to happen, especially for such a hard topic," she said. "The power is to empower the kids. That's really how transformation happens."

Her vision is for the program to seep into the community and the remaining schools in the Littleton Elementary School District. She wants local businesses and organizations to get involved, too.

Pupils are taking the pledge into the community by asking for donations to buy T-shirts for each child in the school. About \$3,000 has been raised toward a \$10,000 goal.

"My vision is for it to be in all schools in the district and in Arizona," Lampee said. "It's all about them. It's their school, their community."

This spring, the founder of the organization, Ann Kelly, is scheduled to visit Quentin Elementary to speak with pupils and acknowledge their dedication to the project. Area police and fire service personnel and public officials will also be invited to share the pledge with pupils.

"We want to stop the bullying. We want the world to be better," fifth-grader Emily Long, 11, said.

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