

Standing up to bullies

Students learn skills to combat bullying

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“You must be the change you want to see in the world.”

That famous Gandhi quote served as the theme for an anti-bullying conference hosted by the Halton Catholic District School Board and the Halton Region last Friday. Two students from each of the Catholic board's 47 elementary and secondary schools attended the event, formally called Be the Change! Youth Leadership and Action Day.

The focus of the conference was to give students the opportunity to learn new skills that could be used in the halls and classrooms to combat the age-old problem of bullying.

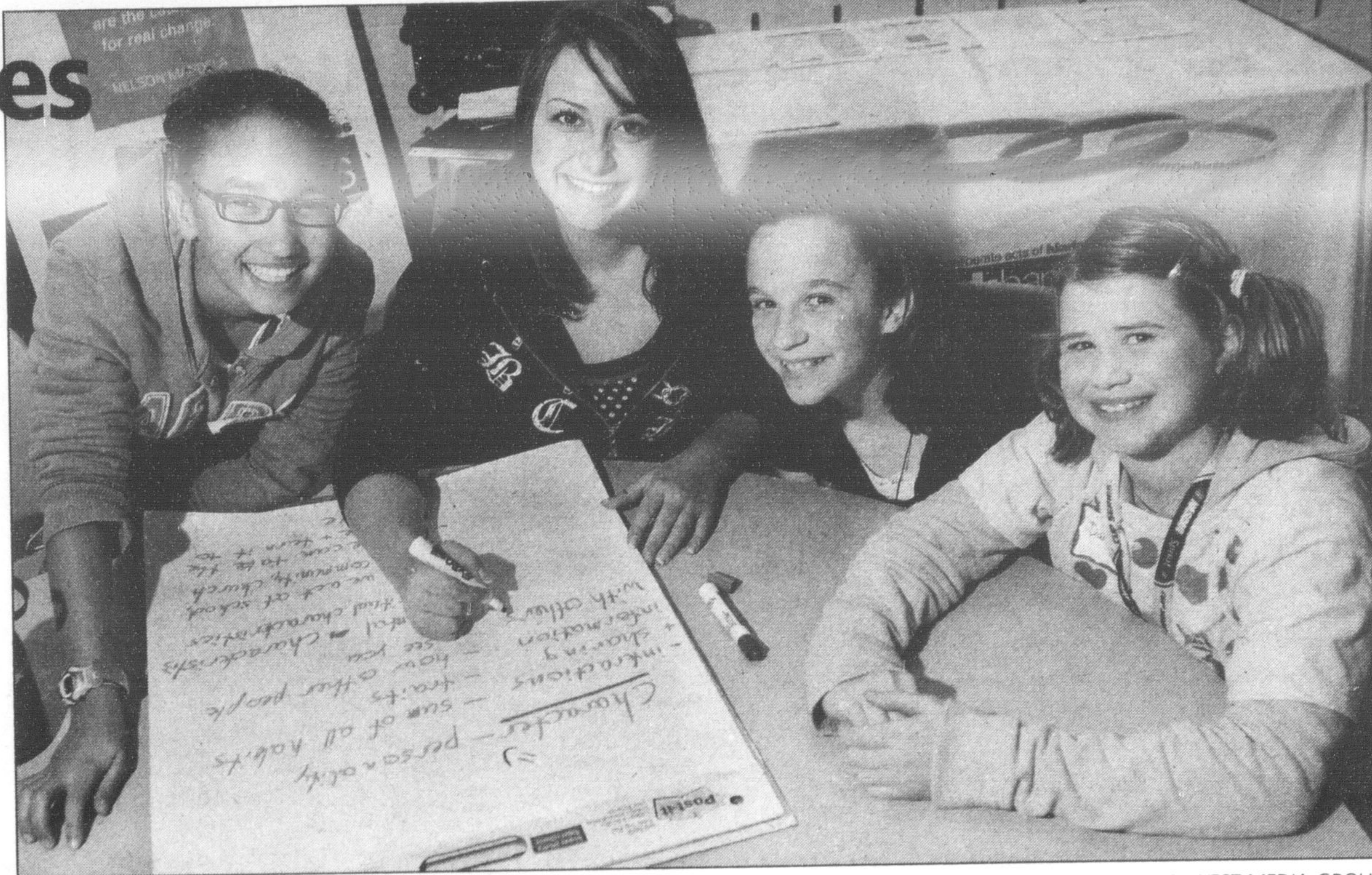
While they were picking up fresh ideas, students were also

sharing initiatives already proving successful in their schools.

Danielle Walker, a Grade 6 student at St. Brigid Elementary School in Halton Hills, is a member of her school's Peace Team. The Peace Team program, which started last year, works by assigning a virtue to each month. When students around the school are seen practising that virtue, such as responsibility or respect, they are given a charm they can wear on a necklace or bracelet.

“It is all about helping others, like helping someone tie their shoelace,” Walker said. “Everybody is a person and you shouldn't treat people badly. Bullying makes them feel really bad about themselves. Some people can come up to you and call you names and you will think that you are a geek, which is bad.”

The conference featured hands-on workshops, with students working on projects like virtue necklaces and posters with anti-bullying slogans, as well as guest speakers addressing topics like



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BRAINSTORMING: Students (from left) Krysta Peralto, Taylor DeClerico, Jessica Novak and Danielle Walker brainstorm during the Be the Change! Youth Leadership and Action Day.

online safety and cyber bullying.

One unique aspect of the event was that both elementary and secondary schools were represented, with students from Grades 6-12

taking part.

“We really stress to them to be the change you want to see in the world,” said Rosanna Bird, child and youth counsellor with the Catholic board. “If they are a high school student, model it, because elementary students will follow.”

Taylor DeClerico, a Grade 11 student at Notre Dame Secondary School in Burlington, said the older students were learning from the younger students. She added that bullying is a problem that affects students of all ages.

“Bullying is an issue, it has been

since the beginning of time and it comes in all forms, physically and emotionally, and we have to stop it because school is a place for learning and should be a positive experience, not a negative one,” she said. “Students should be able to learn in a safe environment.”

Notre Dame has several anti-bullying initiatives, according to DeClerico. The school has an anti-bullying committee of staff and student members, with the student council and athletic association also developing anti-bullying events and strategies.

Students are also wearing and exchanging wristbands created by a pair of Oakville entrepreneurs that celebrate random acts of kindness.

This month's message at the school is It's Cool To Care, with students donning blue and white to show their support to stop bullying.

“Everyone from every different aspect of the school is really coming together and working on this project,” DeClerico said.

A recent event showed that the students at Notre Dame are walking the talk. When a male student at the school was ridiculed for wear-

• see STUDENTS on page A14

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953 Zelinsky Crescent, \$389,900, James Micallef
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1026 Cumming Blvd., \$309,000, Chris & Andrea Seventikidis
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