

6th Annual S.A.V.E Summit

RALEIGH -- Three more school shootings grabbed the nation's attention this month, but Saturday, 1,000 students from around the Southeast gathered in Raleigh to talk about solutions to the horror of school violence.

They are members of Students Against Violence Everywhere, a group that started in Charlotte in 1989 after the death of a teenager who was trying to break up a fight. The organization has blossomed to 78,000 members in 34 states.

At the sixth annual S.A.V.E. Summit, which took place at N.C. State's McKimmon Center, elementary, middle and high school students shared ideas for preventing conflict. They also heard a message of hope from **Bernice King** of Atlanta, the youngest daughter of Dr. Martin Luther **King Jr.**

"The sin of violence against young people is on a rampage," **King** said. "S.A.V.E., what you are doing is being light bearers. Continue to be the light until this darkness subsides."

King, whose father was slain when she was 5, said she carried anger with her as a child. "There were times when I literally felt like a time bomb waiting to explode," she said.

But the love of her family and her relationship with God helped her overcome the anger, she said.

"Now I understand what it means to turn the other cheek," **King** said. "It means stand strong, be bold and be an example that there can be another way."

The students at the S.A.V.E. chapter at Northern High School in Durham are looking for positive ways to stem conflict. The group has more than 160 members, and it won S.A.V.E's Chapter of the Year award Saturday.

Northern High has seen a decrease in fights since S.A.V.E. trained 13 students as mediators. The group offers students gift certificates and raffled prizes if they achieve a monthly "fight-free school zone."

"We encourage people to walk away from fights and take someone with them," said Brandon Boxler, a senior at Northern High. "We have done workshops combatting what we call 'the Jerry Springer atmosphere.' "

Now the group has a new challenge - discouraging gangs at the high school. They have sought advice from the Durham County Sheriff's Department and Durham Police Department.

"We're working very delicately," Boxler said.

Pamela Riley, executive director of S.A.V.E.'s national association, said the group has grown dramatically since the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado. School officials from the San Diego area, where two of this month's shootings occurred, called Riley's office and asked for materials to start some new chapters.

"We need to involve young people in the solution," Riley said. "What's more powerful - a teacher and a principal breaking up a fight and suspending a student for five or 10 days, or the disapproval of your peers?"

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