Male Rindge & Latin staff members listened at a training session for a curriculum that asks young boys to rethink concepts of manhood.

By Jeremy C. Fox | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | JANUARY 03, 2017

CAMBRIDGE — Students who rallied outside this city’s public high school last spring described harrowing experiences: unwelcome sexual advances and other inappropriate behavior by male classmates and others.

They issued a two-page letter to administrators demanding changes to the school
climate and to administrators’ handling of student reports of harassment or assault.

More than eight months later, Cambridge Rindge & Latin School is preparing to address relations between students head-on, by asking boys to rethink their ideas about manhood.

One recent morning, nearly a dozen male educators gathered in a semicircle in a third-floor room at the school to begin examining their own notions of gender and of relationships between men and women.

The nine teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators talked about the pressure for boys and men to be strong, assertive, and brave, to protect women, but also to sometimes view women as property. They discussed the fear of appearing vulnerable and ways that “soft” emotions like sadness or fear can be channeled into anger — an emotion that can be more socially acceptable for men to express.

Tommy Goldman, an English teacher and lacrosse coach, told his colleagues he tries to break down barriers that make his student-athletes uncomfortable.
defensive lineman whose son was Goldman’s childhood friend.

“Particularly when traumatic things happen, but really all the time, I make a point of saying to my guys, ‘I love you guys,’ ” Goldman said. “And I know that’s a weird thing, and it freaks them out when I say it, but, ‘I love you guys, like you’re my brothers.’ ”

The educators are preparing for Rindge & Latin to become one of 18 schools across the country to introduce a curriculum called LiveRespect, which was developed by the violence-prevention organization A Call to Men.

The group’s cofounder, Ted Bunch, said the organization was born out of the women’s movement about 15 years ago, with a mission to reach not just men who would abuse women but also nonviolent men who would fail to intervene in domestic violence.

“We’ve been taught that women have less value than men,” Bunch said in a phone interview. “We see it every day. On any sports field that you go on, you can see a coach — a good guy, a wonderful guy — or a father or an uncle say to a boy, ‘You’ve got to throw harder than that, son. You throw like a girl.’ ”

The LiveRespect curriculum will join a series of other measures educators have taken since April’s student walkout to address relations between boys and girls.

The school has enhanced its training for recognizing and responding to sexual harassment, according to principal Damon Smith.

Smith also has met several times with the school’s feminist club and other student leadership groups to discuss changes to policies on reporting harassment or assault, he said, and posters explaining those policies now hang in every school restroom.

At their recent meeting, trainers from A Call to Men challenged educators to
children, and the ways women are depicted in pornography.

The discussion’s impact became clear by midmorning, when Goldman, the lacrosse coach, told the group he was reconsidering what constitutes domestic abuse.

“If you had talked to me two hours ago, I would definitely have separated mental, and physical, and verbal abuse,” he said. “Just since we started talking about how violence can be manifested in different ways — not just physical — an hour ago, I’ve kind of just been sitting here ruminating, like, I didn’t really think about that.”

While the educators embraced the curriculum and the tough questions it asks, Mike Tubinis, a guidance counselor, said he had concerns about how the school’s diverse population of students and their families might respond to it.

“This is cultural, some of this stuff,” he said. “This is really heavy-duty ingrained into what they believe, and it’s religious to some — like men are men, and this is what it is going to be.”

Smith, the principal, said parents with reservations will have a chance to opt their sons out of the curriculum, just as they do with sex education. In an interview a few days later, he pronounced the training a success and said the school is moving forward with plans to implement the curriculum.

“I think everybody left there feeling really positive about the opportunity that A Call to Men provided,” Smith said.

Bentley Sloane, a Rindge & Latin student who helped organized the April protest, said she has seen some change within the school, but there is much more to be done. She hopes the LiveRespect curriculum can be part of a broader change.

“It’s important to stop this idea that your masculinity depends on suppressing femininity,” she said.

Sloane said student activism will continue at the school, and a Take Back the Night
“Change takes a lot of time,” she said.

**About LiveRespect**

Cambridge Rindge & Latin is set to become one of 18 schools across the country to introduce a curriculum called LiveRespect. Its goals:

- Promote healthy, respectful manhood
- Decrease language and actions that degrade women, girls, and other marginalized groups
- Challenge harmful cultural and social norms
- Decrease instances of bullying and homophobia

SOURCE: LiveRespect.org

*Jeremy C. Fox can be reached at jeremy.fox@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @jeremycfox.*
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