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Survivors, families develop school lessons on attacks

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STAFF WRITER

As the eighth anniversary of 9/11 approaches, at least two new curriculums about the terrorist attacks are aiming for voluntary use in New Jersey schools.

On Tuesday, the September 11th Education Trust, a non-profit group of survivors and victims' families, unveiled its interactive curriculum. It includes 70 video interviews with witnesses, victims' families, rescuers and politicians that include Rudolph Giuliani, New York City's mayor during the crisis. Discussion questions aim to help students debate the government's role in disasters, the nature of heroism and foreign policy issues.

River Dell Regional High School in Oradell is one of six schools nationwide piloting the new program by using its "Remembrance Presentation" on Thursday. Superintendent Patrick Fletcher said about 100 students in Grades 10 and 11 U.S. History 2 classes will participate this week, and all students at the high school will be exposed to the presentation at some point when they take that history course.

"It's a stimulating curriculum that addresses the kind of learners we have today with the imagery that's embedded," Fletcher said.

He said his teachers also weave themes related to 9/11 into classes throughout the year. Three River Dell graduates were among more than 700 New Jerseyans killed in the attacks.

"Our goal is to help students remember the human dimension of these events," said Anthony Gardner, director of the September 11th Education Trust and brother of a 9/11 victim.

Some program materials are available for free at [LearnAbout9-11.org](http://LearnAbout9-11.org). The North Jersey Media Group Foundation, the charitable arm of the publisher of The Record and Herald News, is a sponsor.

Meanwhile, a consortium including the non-profit Families of September 11, Liberty Science Center and the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education is piloting a K-

12 curriculum with more than 160 age-appropriate lessons. Topics for elementary schools focus on human behavior, such as bullying and standing up against injustice, while guides for high school students delve into the thorny issues of global security and civic action.

"The take-away point is what students can do to make the world a safer place," said Donna Gaffney, co-director of the curriculum project known as the "4 Action Initiative."

So far, 58 teachers from around the state, including three from Bergen County, have signed up for an Oct. 20 conference in Jersey City to learn how to use the resources. After incorporating feedback from teachers, the consortium plans to unroll the material for broad use in 2010.


Former Gov. Thomas H. Kean has worked with the consortium, along with MaryEllen Salamone, a mother of three in North Caldwell who lost her husband in the attacks. She said it is crucial for children to understand terrorism worldwide, not just that one day's catastrophe.

"So many children now define terrorism as the attacks of 9/11," she said. "But it's widespread and more complex than that. If children are going to be our leaders of tomorrow, they need to understand what terrorism is. It's an awful reality and a global issue."

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