

Chagrin Falls senior wins cyberbullying essay contest

By **BARBARA CHRISTIAN** | **Posted: Wednesday, March 30, 2016 11:45 pm**

Earlier this year, local attorney Alex Gertsburg asked Chagrin Falls and Kenston high school students for their input on cyberbullying.

His law firm, along with the Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce and Burntwood Tavern, decided to hold an essay contest to gather ideas for a solution.

The “We Solve Problems Essay Contest” drew entries from 750 students in ninth through 12th grade, nearly half the student body.

But Mr. Gertsburg had another reason for launching for the project. As a member of the chamber, which is dedicated to good business practices and passing them on, he wanted young people to understand what it takes to bring shape and form to an idea and how to communicate and verbalize the concepts.

Eight finalists -- four from each grade at Chagrin Falls and Kenston high schools -- were chosen by judges Len Komoroski, CFO of the Cleveland Cavs, and Jeff Hoffman, co-founder of Priceline.com. On Wednesday night, the finalists and invited guests gathered at Chagrin Falls Township Hall to learn that Chagrin Falls High School 11th grader Morgan Walker had won.

She advocated that the educational system should take a stronger role in combating the practice through teaching, procedures, intervention, punishment, dispute resolution and student involvement via an anonymous hotline.

The finalists were:

KENSTON -- Lauren Lance, 12th grade; Erica Belfi, 11th grade; Grace Cannon, 10th grade and William Toth, 9th grade.

CHAGRIN FALLS -- Molly Burke, 12th grade; Morgan Walker, 11th grade; Abbey Cloonan, 10th grade; Anna Orywal, 9th grade.

Here is Morgan’s winning essay.

HOW I WOULD SOLVE CYBERBULLYING

By Morgan Walker

11th grade, Chagrin Falls High School

Cyberbullying defines as applying technology to harass others; thus, with the past decade's tremendous influx of innovation in technology and social media, instances of cyber bullying correspondingly escalate.

With over 604 million new users on social media than in 2006, state governments have only just begun mentioning the word "cyberbullying" in law form. Although 32 percent of teens report experiencing some form of harassment via the internet, cyber bullying still prevails without constructive endeavors in schools.

By educating students about the effects of cyberbullying, while developing clear protocol to reports of victimization, schools can combat the growing trend of bullying over social media.

For the past decade, technology has become the leading means of communication. Whether over social media accounts or instant messaging applications, teens have depended on technology to hide behind screens and harass their peers.

Therefore, I propose that school administrators combat this issue by educating students about the effects of bullying on both the victim and the perpetrator, while also revealing past incidents of cyber bullying. When adolescents undergo the psychological harm of cyber bullying, they develop emotional responses which typically include depression, lack of self-esteem, and in some cases...inclinations of suicide.

Additionally, schools need to address the detrimental effects of victimizing others as a cyberbully. Such offenses lead to consequences with schools and the law, often convicting bullies with misdemeanor or criminal charges, suspensions and other fit repercussions. Schools can avoid such outcomes and promote integration within their student body by hosting interactive assemblies to overcome differences while infiltrating status quos.

Education can also serve to solve the issue of cyber bullying in schools when used to inform students about specific instances of cyber bullying. A shocking number of 4,400 deaths per year occur resulting from cyber bullying. For instance, the Amanda Todd case, a heartbreaking story of a girl who committed suicide after suffering blackmail and bullying online, would force students to put into perspective the seriousness of victimization. Thus, the solution to cyber bullying lies in educating students and staff about the effects of cyber bullying, and how the harassment has led to many preventable suicides.

In continued effort to end the growing trend of cyber bullying, administrators must develop clear protocol and reporting systems for online harassment. An anonymous hotline to report observations of cyberbullying would ensure the student's trust in staff to inflict not only punishment for bullies, but resolution between victims and bullies. By implementing an intervention into protocol, a civilized

unravelment of the dispute guarantees the end of the conflict.

With just under half of all cyber bullying cases reported, the hotline system would work efficiently to establish a convenient way to address instances of harassment via social media. After reported and dealt with in deliberation, suitable consequences inflict the bully to prevent the conflict's recurrence.

Therefore, schools can promote the movement against cyber bullying by intervening in student disputes, inflicting consequence on offenders, and providing accessible reporting systems for perceived cyber bullying incidents.

To conclude, I write to persuade school administrators to take action in educating students and developing responsive policy to instances of online bullying. As shown however, many schools avoid responding to complaints of cyber bullying. They wrongly assume that they aren't involved in online matters. I also work to encourage student reliability on schools to act as their protectors and inflict suitable consequence on bullies when necessary.

Although most students continue to view their school as incompetent in dealing with instances of cyber bullying, many schools work to combat this perception by taking vigorous action in repairing relationships between students. I believe that schools can completely diminish cyber bullying by assuring students of the urgency in confronting the issue immediately.

(Note: For easier reading, The Chagrin Valley Times added paragraphing and removed source citations. Morgan used five sources for her research and thesis.)