

A Conversation Begun, But Not Finished

- Dan Rosenberg

Over my four years in Marblehead High School, I have seen a variety of speakers brought into our school to discuss fostering a sense of community. These speakers are often very moving; they discuss intense, heartfelt experiences, and have tried to eradicate bullying from our school. Frequently, they use past tragedies as tools, and after these speakers come in, there's rarely a dry eye in the building.

The issue is not with the school bringing in people to galvanize the student body; they have done a great job at that. The problem is taking long-term action, and making sure that the ideals espoused by the speakers are actually put into practice.

I can remember as a sophomore, we had a group called Rachel's Challenge come into the school. They told the story of a girl who died at Columbine, and it was a very moving presentation. Afterwards, every student was encouraged to sign a banner that was hung in the school, a banner which said none of us would ever participate in bullying. And for a few days, our school was a picture of harmony. But instead of continually focusing on fostering this sense of community, the school simply began to move on. The banner still hung in the school, but it lost the meaning it had held when it was first signed. Slowly but surely, Rachel's Challenge became a moving yet distant memory. So while the school did a great job of beginning this discussion on bullying and kindness, there seemed to be a lack of continuing focus on the issue long after the speakers left the school.

That brings us to last week, when the school brought in Calvin Terrell, a man from Phoenix, Arizona, who has extensive experience with social justice, and issues of hate, to speak to us about being "warriors, not cowards." Mr. Terrell brought perhaps the most intense message I've heard in our school, and encouraged students to apologize for wrongs they had committed against each other publicly. It really was a heartfelt and emotional experience for all of the students at the presentation. But after Mr. Terrell came, there has been no follow up. So while his message was clear, I'm worried that once again it will soon go by the wayside. And so then perhaps next year there will be a new speaker, but no new change.

I commend the school on their commitment to beginning the discussion on social justice; but it is a conversation that has been begun over and over again. We need to go further than just this beginning; if we really do want to make a lasting change to the community at Marblehead High, it will need to come not from the outside, but from within the school.