

OPINION



FIGHT TRANSPHOBIA WITH EDUCATION

Shaming students won't change hearts or build coalition

BY GARY SCHMIDT
CO EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On Monday, students piled in by the dozens to begin a sit-in prompted by a dispute that began in the Class of 2018 group message.

During the next six-plus hours, the number of protesters swelled to nearly 200 students, all taking a stand for what they believed in.

The sit-in was specifically aimed at addressing messages posted in the group message that disparaged transgender people.

The statements were not just in bad taste or accidentally offensive. They were unequivocally wrong.

The intentions of the protest were both noble and justified. Messages with clear ill intent toward the transgender community were shared openly in a group of more than 150 students. The protesters rightly demanded an equitable and fair community for all students — a community free of unjustified attacks and the knowledge that transgender classmates are people and not the punchline to a joke.

Our transgender students are important, and they deserve a school full of enthusiastic allies.

But I fear that the public shaming that filled the day risks alienating many students from the cause. Some students were wrongly shamed, which diminishes the real harm others caused.

The tactic even falters with those

who brought shame on themselves. With their comments turned into posters and their names called out during the protest and on social media, the real message of the protest was blurred in the eyes of many students.

You can't fight fire with fire.

Protesters are most successful when they draw attention to an important issue. But they can't be the ones to hand out punishment. Administrators have the role of taking care of discipline, not the protesters. As students we have a responsibility to report issues to administrators. But the system only works if administrators act in an appropriate and timely manner. Judging from student concerns expressed on Monday, administrators need to work on building that trust.

SIGN OF SUPPORT — Students signed a banner in support of "Trans Rights" during the sit-in Monday in the rotunda. Students stayed there all day demanding the school address transphobia in the school. Photo by Emily Kruse

At the core of the problem remained one clear flaw: a lack of understanding.

Among the deep issues that are present, is the lack of understanding of transgender people. The key to resolving the problems present is not shame but education. Hopefully, a plan for properly educating students arises as an outcome of the sit-in.

I commend the organizers of the protest for taking the difficult and brave steps toward fighting for their own equality. I full heartedly believe that feeling comfortable in your own school is a right that must be honored.

I also believe change is needed, and I fear we will fall short of that change if tactics focus on public shaming. It's time to change hearts through positive messages of learning and growth, rather than relying on shame as a device to bring about change.

BECOMING VISIBLE

Homecoming candidates will now be gender neutral, to the joy of a nonbinary senior

BY RILEE GERMAN-
MARTINEZ
COPY EDITOR

My experience as a nonbinary student at Lawrence High has been infinitely better than the one I could've had back in my hometown of Lee's Summit, Mo. The population here is heterogeneous and, for the most part, goes against what is mainstream. Missouri is... well, Missouri.

The district has begun to recognize that not every student is cisgender and has changed its policies accordingly. Students with parent permission can go to the district office to change their names in the Skyward system, and administrators have emphasized learning students' pronouns and preferred names.

Last year, only two of my teachers passed out note cards requesting preferred pronouns; this year, it was triple that amount.

Following this trend, Lawrence High will have gender-neutral candidates for Homecoming. Whether you support it or not, it is important to realize just how important and progressive this is for the nonbinary student body.

Homecoming kings and queens are a trademark of every high school. They're the subject of teen movies and are very John Hughes-esque. It's a tradition, I know, but most of the time traditions are very hetero and cisnor-

mative. The girl cheerleader. The boy who stars on the football team.

With gender neutral homecoming candidates, the pool of possible candidates opens up. Usually it feels like a popularity contest, but as someone who really isn't popular, I feel like maybe I could be nominated. Before, being deemed as homecoming queen would have made me really uncomfortable, but just being regular homecoming royalty is a lot more enjoyable.

I imagine that some people are upset about the end of homecoming "king" and "queen," but the tradition isn't ruined. We still have homecoming candidates — just a little more inclusive. Lawrence High values diversity and inclusiveness, so that should extend to our traditions. It's what makes our high school the way it is.

I have a lot of pride for Lawrence High and how we are aware of our students, their backgrounds and orientations. I hear stories from Missouri about GSA clubs that have to meet in secret, homophobic teachers who fail students because of their sexuality and the cruel bullying. Lawrence High isn't like that. We're so much more different than the rest of Kansas, a conservative hub. I'm proud to call Lawrence my home, and I bet you are, too.

There are gay couples and nonbinary students here at LHS. We exist and always have. It's time that we get recognized by everyone, and it's time we get celebrated for who we are.

MOVING AHEAD

After sit-in, communication and education become focus of efforts to improve school

BY CONNOR SCHMAUS
MANAGING EDITOR

In the weeks since students filled the rotunda for a sit-in over transphobic comments, school officials are focused on improving communication and education.

Following the Sept. 18 protest of comments made in a GroupMe chat filled with seniors, students and faculty say they hope to use education to prevent harassment and discrimination.

“There’s a desperate need for education in our culture and in our district, specifically concerning LGBTQIA+ areas,” said Randall Frye, co-sponsor of Total Equality Alliance. “There’s a lack of knowledge and a lot of times when there’s an issue of any kind, it’s because of a lack of knowledge. People don’t have the resources or the understanding to even identify what some of this is.”

Immediately following the protest, the district’s Equity Advisory Council met with four students who participated in the sit-in. The students addressed demands, along with their input on what happened. The main concern of the group, other than the discrimination itself, was the lack of immediate recognition of offensive comments, in

addition to the general lack of education on LGBTQ+ issues.

“When this occurred, they didn’t feel like they were being heard or that action was being taken soon enough,” said Lindsay Buck, a member of the Equity Advisory Council and a co-sponsor of TEA. “There are people who bully...but ignorance is never an excuse for that.”

Before the protest, Lawrence High had taken steps to better support LGBTQ students. Last year, for example, the school opened an all-genders bathroom. The recent Homecoming nominations process was gender-neutral.

“I think Lawrence High is a great community and a very accepting and embracing community but that doesn’t mean there aren’t issues,” assistant principal Mark Preut said. “Some steps have been taken to resolve those issues, make LHS a safer place.”

Although anti-discrimination policies are outlined on the school’s website and in the planner, some believe it relates back to a lack of education.

“As far as the anti-discrimination policy, I’m not sure our students are aware we have one,” Frye said. “I think there’s a real lack of knowledge.”

In response, administrators are planning a student-run panel to confront on-



going issues and to open communication within the school. The panel will consist of members from leadership and equity groups, including TEA, Inter-Tribal Club, Black Student Association and Student Council, along with the sponsors of those organizations. Administrators also want to incorporate outspoken voices involved in the protest.

“The purpose is to open those avenues of communication between administration, faculty and students, to talk about issues — not necessarily the, ‘Hey, this happened yesterday’ immediate kind of things — but a broader context,” Preut said.

The district has also taken action. The school board this month agreed to recommendations from an LGBTQ+

Task Force, a group created last school year to encourage more accepting policy for schools. Among the recommendations accepted by the school board were:

- Address students by their preferred names and pronouns
- Provide students access to locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity
- Allow students to participate in groups/activities that correspond with their gender identity by avoiding using gender as a characteristic in classroom/school activities

Students who witnessed the protest found some comfort in this situation, saying that it shows a certain strength within the student body.

“I think [the protest] says that we can

work through issues,” senior John Ely said.

Preut said LHS is taking additional steps to improve the climate.

“We are also working a little bit with KU to develop some training for staff and students we want to push into classrooms at some point to raise awareness again and to help people understand so that we don’t have people acting out of ignorance, stereotype or bias,” he said.

Moving forward, students who orchestrated the protest want LHS and the district to know their strong intolerance for hate, while maintaining a positive attitude for education in the future.

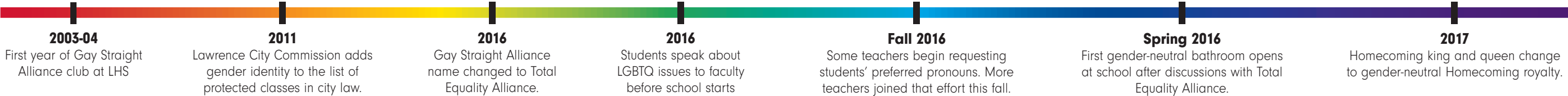
“We are a school that stands together against bullying of any kind,” sophomore Elliot Bradley said. “We do not tolerate

SIT-IN — Students gather in the rotunda on Sept. 18 at the start of a protest over transphobic comments. “I think overall, it was a good thing,” said junior Eli Mardis, who was sitting in the center at the back of the group. “I have some trans friends, so I definitely think it’s important. The leaders of the protest were really ripping into the administration about problems not being addressed, nobody was really listening to each other though. Hopefully this raises awareness and lets people know this is a problem that needs to be fixed.” Photo by Emily Kruse.

hate or discrimination toward any of our students and I think that is something we’re very proud of as a school and as a community.”

MOVING TOWARD EQUALITY

BY ANNA PARNELL



SCHOOLS STRUGGLE WITH FREE SPEECH

BY MACY LANDES
CO COPY CHIEF

When Lawrence High School students protested against transphobia last month, they joined the ranks of students who for decades across the nation have tested how the First Amendment is applied in school.

The most famous case is that of Mary Beth Tinker, who was a middle schooler when she peacefully protested the Vietnam War by wearing a black armband with a peace sign on it during the school day. Tinker was suspended and her family sued the school district. After the local and state courts ruled in favor of the school district, the Supreme Court heard her case and ruled in favor of her First Amendment rights, noting that the protest did not cause a substantial disruption to the school day.

The question of disruption has been key in other court cases in which the court ruled schools could choose to limit the free speech of students.

“From a technical, legal standpoint, free speech ends where it causes a substantial disruption at school,” assistant principal Mark Preut said. “Was it [the sit-in] disruptive? It disrupted the flow around the school, it created lots of chatter, but it wasn’t like other students weren’t able to go to class and have class during the sit-in.”

Assistant principal Mike Norris said the law can be confusing and administrators generally look first to board policy. While court cases can provide some guidance, unless those cases were decided by the Supreme Court, Norris noted that judges from different regions have reached different conclusions.

“We also have the luxury of having an attorney that works at the school district and people at the district office, and there are times where we’re like, ‘Wow, this is a big one,’” Norris said. “We



THE FIRST AMENDMENT

CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES.

confer [with the attorney] because now we need specific advice.”

When it comes to cyberbullying or off-campus speech — such as the statements that led to the protest — the right actions become even less clear, even for those who study the issue.

“This is an area that’s in pretty serious flux,” Student Press Law Center legal consultant Mike Hiestand said. “There’s a grayness. There’s a lot of discrepancies between the core ideas [and] just trying to figure out where the line actually exists.”

Often, administrators can only address what happens during school.

“It is very difficult for them to

make a reach of what happens outside the school,” said G.A. Buie, executive director of United School Administrators of Kansas. “When it trickles back into school, though, you can make some connections.”

With personalized devices, how much reach administrators have becomes even more of a concern.

“The reality is, no policy or procedure has been made about what kids can and cannot do on their computers,” Norris said of the one-to-one devices given to students this year.

When conflict does occur — online or in real life — administrators find it difficult to decide what they should do

DEMANDING CHANGE — Students take part in a sit-in in the rotunda to support transgender students. The sit-in began during second hour on Sept. 18 and continued throughout the school day. Photo by Emily Kruse

next. They can take different stances on disciplinary action, because, often, the law doesn’t specify how they should react to controversial issues.

“Some people are going to the land on [one] side and say, ‘If there’s bullying behavior, there has to be quick and swift consequences,’” Buie said. “And you’re going to find other people who are going to say that if you have bully behavior, the best way to handle it is through strong education and learning opportunities.

“And I don’t know that there’s a perfect answer,” Buie continued. “Sometimes you can educate, educate, educate, and eventually you have to consequence. And sometimes, the bully is so bad, that you immediately have to have consequences because of the situation that it creates.”

Schools can easily regulate offensive speech on campus, but public schools can find themselves in a difficult situation when trying to regulate off-campus speech that is offensive, noted Frank LoMonte, who is head of the Joseph L. Brechner Center for Freedom of Information at the University of Florida.

“We don’t want the government to get into the business of deciding what’s offensive,” LoMonte said.

Preut believes education remains the most effective method for addressing offensive speech.

“Discipline ought to always be, as much as possible, about educating,” Preut said.

Deemed a “million dollar question” by Buie, administrators have to ask themselves how they can balance making sure school functions properly and making sure kids feel safe, especially in this relatively new era of online communication.

“People are braver behind a computer screen than they are in person, so that creates a lot of challenges for administrators,” he said. “What they have to do is they have to try to find that fine line between focusing on what’s most important in school, which is educating kids, and managing a safe, orderly, and enjoyable environment for kids to be in.”

Norris argues you can’t have one without the other.

“If you don’t feel safe, I don’t believe you can learn,” Norris said.

COURT CASES

These four cases will help you understand how the First Amendment right to free speech applies at school

Graphics by Will Damron

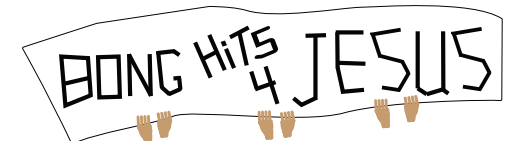
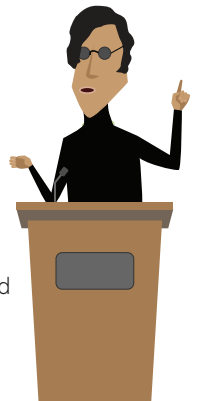


TINKER VS. DES MOINES

Mary Beth Tinker was among a group of students who wore black armbands to school in 1965 to protest the Vietnam War. They were suspended. The Supreme Court ruled that the school district had violated their free speech rights, saying, “It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”

BETHEL VS. FRASER

In the 1980s, Matthew Fraser gave a raunchy speech full of sexual innuendo during an all-school assembly. He sued after he was suspended but lost. The Supreme Court said the school could prohibit vulgar and offensive language and speech inconsistent with “the fundamental values of public school education.”

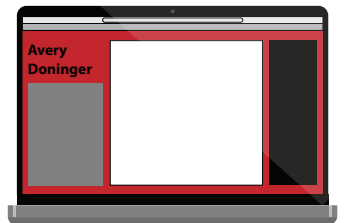


MORSE VS. FREDERICK

When students at his Juneau, Alaska, high school were allowed to watch the Olympic Torch Relay pass by near their school in 2002, Joseph Frederick unfurled a banner reading, “Bong Hits 4 Jesus.” He was suspended for 10 days and sued. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the school, saying it had a right to protect students from what could arguably be seen as a pro-drug message.

DONINGER VS. NIEHOFF

When Avery Doninger criticized school officials online in 2007 by calling them “douchebags,” her principal disqualified her from running for a student council seat. An appeals court ruled in favor of the principal, saying she was entitled to qualified immunity from the suit. The Supreme Court declined to hear arguments in the case.



OPINION

PROTEST SHINES LIGHT ON WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A TRANS STUDENT AT LHS

Editor's Note: This editorial is being printed anonymously because the student has not come out to their parents.

Being non-binary at Lawrence High has been anything but easy.

Even though I'm not out to all of my peers, I cannot recall how many times slurs have been catapulted at me for presenting myself androgynously in school and during extracurriculars.

That may be surprising to some. After all, Lawrence High is seen as forward-thinking. We have an all-gender bathroom and an active Total Equality Alliance club. Overall, I'm thrilled I attend LHS as opposed to other schools in Kansas.

However, these school-wide efforts have likely lulled many into thinking trans and non-binary students always feel secure and welcome in this building.

I promise, we don't.

We experience a lot that goes unnoticed or dismissed.

One example of the harassment I endure quite often happens when I am walking down the hallway and accidentally get in someone's way. At least a dozen times, I've been called the t-slur. Sometimes these comments seem never-ending, so I can't imagine the harassment that my fellow trans and non-binary peers who are openly out at LHS go through.

At the beginning of this year, I expected serious progress. Almost every

teacher asked for my pronouns, and it made me feel like they and other staff cared about my safety and identity. It was a refreshing and positive turn of events from my years as an underclassmen.

While these actions are progressive, Lawrence High is still lacking a guarantee of safety for its transgender students – often because our peers aren't educated about us. These are the issues administrators need to address.

I recognize they can't accomplish everything that is asked of them because of legality issues, but with this pressing issue and their lack of communication with students and staff, it feels as if they are sweeping it under the rug.

Some administrators probably feel as if they have taken care of the situation. Interim superintendent Anna Stubblefield talked during the homecoming assembly about social media presence and being aware of the things you say because they last forever. While this information is vital, not addressing the initial situation – the harassment of a minority – is detrimental and will not help us progress.

We could've handled this better. Administrators could've talked to the student body about how transphobia will not be tolerated, and that they will make it their job to make trans and non-binary students feel safe. It was an opportunity to apologize for not acting when they saw that hate speech had occurred in the first place.

But they didn't. And because of such, those in

charge should be held accountable.

To our administrators: Trans and non-binary students feel more unsafe and terrified than ever before. If we are truly the progressive school that we claim to be, we will make an effort to educate not just staff members but students on trans issues, thus creating a safer environment for everyone.

And to my fellow transgender and non-binary students at Lawrence High: we are strong, and we deserve for our voices to be heard. Safety should be guaranteed, and we should never stop fighting for it. Transphobia will not be tolerated.



OTHER VOICES

GO TO LHSBUDGET.COM to read other viewpoints on the protest. Here's portions of what you'll find:

**ETANA PARKS
& JONAVON SHEPARD
PROTEST ORGANIZERS**

The bags under our eyes and the strain in our muscles tell their own story. The stress we carry is akin to Atlas carrying the world, but it's not a curse. If we help make life at LHS better for trans students, and students of all marginalized groups, maybe our bags and strained muscles are our badge of honor.

The fight is never over. There will always be social injustice that we'll have to combat, but as long as we do fight, whether it's a win or loss, that's what's important. Because, to us, standing idly by while people of marginalized groups aren't given the justice or treatment they deserve is just as bad as delivering that unequal treatment.

**ANNA STUBBLEFIELD
SUPERINTENDENT**

Lawrence Public Schools and Lawrence High School share the same goal as the students: ensuring a safe learning environment for all students. We are listening to student concerns, and as educational leaders, we are focusing on creating additional opportunities for students to learn about respect, understanding, social justice, advocacy and digital citizenship.