

Laney students participate in national anti-violence summit

By Port City Daily staff on March 21, 2016



Members of Laney's SAVE group joined with others from across the country at an annual summit to help prevent youth violence. Courtesy photo.

A group of local students recently joined with their peers from across the nation to help find solutions to modern-day teen issues.

Laney High School's Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) traveled to Raleigh earlier this month for the non-profit's annual national summit. Laney is one of than 2,000 schools nationwide—but the only high school in New Hanover County—with a SAVE chapter.

Founded in 1989 at a Charlotte high school following the death of a student who was trying to break up a fight at an off-campus party, SAVE has now expanded to 48 states.

The summit was yet another effort among the small but dedicated club at Laney to make its school—and the community at large—a safer place through a variety of initiatives, from peer counseling to more high-tech means, such as public service announcement videos about acceptance.

Those efforts are apparently needed. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, violence is the third leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24.

Laney members don't have to look far beyond their school's own hallways and classrooms to see national data in action. Most have seen physical and verbal fights break out, have heard students make disparaging remarks about a peer, know someone who is involved with drugs or the wrong crowd. According to SAVE, students nationwide face a host of dangers—bullying, dating violence, racism, driving and substance abuse among them.

Of all the dangers teens face, Laney SAVE members agreed, the most subtle, yet damaging and rampant, is social media.

Member Keila Mateos said she has seen classmates secretly photograph students in the hallway, then post it on Facebook or Instragram with comments mocking the students' appearance or behavior. Students also often record fights to post online, as well, she said.

And that, Mateos believes, makes a more lasting negative impact than the act of bullying itself.

"Social media has made violence almost into a joke. It's watered it down and people start to think it's funny," she said. "It's not funny."

That is the message SAVE tries to relay to fellow students.

In addition to working one-on-one with students in mediation sessions and making PSAs for the entire school, SAVE reaches out to classmates, faculty and staff at Laney to help them understand ways they can prevent on-campus violence and promote understanding of differences. They even work to show students the dangers of texting while driving and other roadway distractions.

The national summit helps the Laney group – and others like it – feel empowered to lead these initiatives throughout the year.

“[It] provides a unique opportunity for student leaders to share successful safety and violence prevention tactics with their peers, allowing them to return to their chapters and implement new practical solutions,” SAVE executive director Carleen Wray said. “Through interactive activities, powerful presentations and nationally acclaimed speakers, the conference helps train attendees in effective ways to create an overall safer environment.”

With the theme, “A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Step,” inspired by Lao Tzu, this year’s summit focused on change and how it can be brought about simply by taking that first step.

◆ bullying, Laney High School, New Hanover County Schools, SAVE, Students Against Violence Everywhere, violence prevention, Wilmington, Wrightsville Beach, youth violence



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