

July 2016

OFFICE OF THE  
DEAN OF  
STUDENTS

To Whom It May Concern:

For the last two years now I have had the privilege of working with John Halligan. As the Dean of Students at Xavier High School (Middletown, CT) it is my responsibility to bring in speakers throughout the school year to address our student body on current issues facing our youth in today's world. Mr. Halligan first came to share *Ryan's Story* with our entire student body in the spring of 2015. As many administrators probably know it is not easy to find quality speakers at a fair price these days. I cannot tell you how many speakers I have brought in over the years that were a complete bust. So as with all speakers I bring in I usually hold my breath hoping they will be effective. After listening to Mr. Halligan's presentation there is no doubt in my mind that Mr. Halligan has been the best speaker we have had at Xavier High School in the 12 years I have been here. His story about his son Ryan hit home to all of our students and faculty/staff members.

Bullying is a major problem in all grades and in all schools across the country. No school is immune to it. To me personally it is one of the worst things a child could go through during their school aged years. In my job I preach to our students constantly about the importance in treating one another with respect on a daily basis. Over the years I have dealt with too many cases of bullying and it saddens me more and more each time that it happens. As part of the bullying prevention program I instituted at Xavier, I was looking for a speaker to come in and talk to our students about the harmful effects bullying can have on an individual. Mr. Halligan's message fit perfectly into the values we try to instill in our students.

I have the utmost respect for Mr. Halligan. I cannot imagine how hard it must be and emotionally draining for him to tell *Ryan's Story* over and over again. The amount of strength this man possesses is like none I have ever seen in an individual. He has the biggest heart of any person I know because he puts himself and his family's tragedy second to helping out thousands and thousands of other kids and parents. As Mr. Halligan was delivering his presentation to over 800 young men at Xavier you could hear a "pin drop" in our gym. He had everyone's full attention for the entire presentation. I have learned the best way to find out if a speaker was successful is to go right to the students and get their opinions. To be honest I didn't even need to do this because after Mr. Halligan finished his presentation he had a line of over 100 students wishing to thank him. We even had students request to speak with him privately and Mr. Halligan accommodated all of those students as well. Throughout the rest of the day Mr. Halligan was the "buzz" of the school. Students were talking about his presentation in their classes, in the hallways, at their lunch table, and with numerous faculty/staff members in different offices. Xavier High School was a changed place after his presentation. From that moment on you could start to see people being a little nicer and a little more understanding of each other. While we will always still have to deal with bullying cases, I firmly believe Xavier became an even closer community by hearing





*Ryan's Story.* I for one, who rarely show my emotions around my students, found myself getting choked up as I addressed our student body after Mr. Halligan's presentation to thank him for sharing with us the story of his son Ryan.

Mr. Halligan is also the consummate professional. Working with him is so easy! He makes the process of setting up a day for him to come to your school so painless. He answers my emails and calls immediately and is so flexible. On the day he was supposed to visit our school we had inclement weather in the morning and had to delay school and Mr. Halligan adjusted his schedule for us so we would not have to reschedule. He also sends all of the documents for his presentation way ahead of time so there is no last minute preparation. He is also very good with technology which is always a huge help to someone like me who has bad luck every time I touch a computer! Mr. Halligan makes it as stress-free as possible to setup a presentation at your school.

I also highly recommend that you have him talk to your parents. He offers a parent presentation on the night he visits your high school. This presentation was also highly effective because too many parents these days are clueless as to what goes on with their children especially on social media. I had parents emailing me for days thanking me for providing them the opportunity to hear him speak. It opened their eyes to things they never paid attention to before or took seriously.

Mr. Halligan has become part of the Xavier community. We now have him on our schedule to speak at Xavier every year in the fall semester. He now speaks to our freshman and transfer students each year so they can hear his message right out of the gate and be on the same page with our other students. We are blessed to be able to have him with us each year. Mr. Halligan is a strong, passionate, inspiring man who is able to touch the lives of so many through his powerful and heartfelt words. Your students will never forget his message for as long as they live, and hearing his presentation will make them better people who hopefully love their classmates unconditionally. If you had not yet had the privilege of having Mr. Halligan at your school get him to come immediately! Every school in the country should have him come at least once if not on a yearly basis. Again, I am truly blessed to be able to have him come to our community on a yearly basis and help our students become better, more compassionate men. I am privileged to have met Mr. Halligan and now to be able to call him a dear friend of mine.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I can be reached at 860-346-7735.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicholas Cerreta'.

Nicholas Cerreta  
Dean of Students