

Crickets and consequences at Eastridge High

There's a lot of chirping in Irondequoit about a senior prank that saw hundreds of crickets unleashed in bathrooms at Eastridge High School. But this column isn't about crickets. It's about consequences. Here's how the two are related: A couple of weeks ago, three quarters of the senior class at Eastridge by some estimates ditched school for Senior Skip Day, that time-honored rite of passage symbolizing rebellion against authority.

The next day, the principal, Timothy Heaphy, summoned roughly 250 seniors into the auditorium to lay down the law. He warned them against any more hijinks for the remainder of the school year, particularly a senior prank. Another stunt and there would be consequences, he told them.

The culprits would be suspended and prohibited from "Project Graduation," in which students spend the last Friday of classes overnight at the school, an exercise that sounds like hell to anyone over 19 but is a real treat for adolescents.

He would also consider not allowing the guilty students to walk across the stage to receive their diplomas at their graduation.

"The Eastridge climate really needed a forceful message that there are behaviors that are unacceptable and have consequences," said Paul Stack, a longtime Eastridge social studies teacher and head of the district's teachers' union. "The teachers were very much in agreement with the principal."

Now, as any adult who works with adolescents will tell you, adolescents will test the boundaries of authority. That's what they do, as if they were bound by contract to be royal pains in the neck.

So it was that a week later, on a Wednesday morning, hundreds of live crickets were bouncing around a couple of Eastridge bathrooms, leaving custodians to hunt down the insects and Heaphy to hunt down the pains in the neck.

As luck would have it, adolescents chirp like crickets and the school has security cameras in the hallways. Plus, it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to track the source of the crickets to a nearby Petco. (A similar prank was pulled previously.) "That's one of the harmful effects of having a pet store across the street," said David Yates, spokesman for the East Irondequoit School District.

Before the end of the school day, eight students were found to have pulled off the Great Cricket Caper of 2016.

Now, as any adult who works with adolescents will also tell you, adolescents who test the boundaries need to face the consequences, lest authority become meaningless and the world devolve into "Lord of the Flies."

That's why Heaphy kept his word. He suspended the students through the rest of the week and that Friday's "Project Graduation." He didn't bar them from walking the stage at graduation.

The superintendent supported the decision, according to the district and the teachers' union.

Naturally, the guilty students considered this outrageously unfair. Who does Mr. Heaphy think he is keeping them from eating pizza and watching movies in the gym all night?!

What the students might not have known is they had an unlikely ally in the president of the school board,

Kimberly Lasher, who is a mother to a senior at the school and helps organize “Project Graduation.”

When she got wind that some peers of her child wouldn’t be able to enjoy the party, she and other board members leaned on the superintendent to overrule the principal, according to the school district and teachers.

“There were certain members of the board who felt the punishment didn’t fit the crime,” Yates said. “It wasn’t an official board decision.”

The result was the superintendent caved, the principal was undermined, and the offending students — nay, all Eastridge students — were reassured that defiance has no consequences and that someone would always be there to bail them out.

It was a mockery of authority. It was Lord of the Crickets!

What worse graduation gift could have been given to those young people on the cusp of adulthood than to enable them to not accept responsibility for their actions?

None.

And since when does a school board, whose job is to set policy and guide programming, get involved in the dayto- day disciplining of students?

Never.

That’s why board member Jeffrey Petrie was compelled to declare publicly at a board meeting on Tuesday that he and other board members had no knowledge of the intervention after teachers had expressed their disappointment with it. Reached by phone, Petrie said only that the intervention was the work of one or more board members and directed inquiries to Lasher, the president.

Multiple phone messages left for Lasher were met with ... crickets.

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Eight students were found to have pulled off the Great Cricket Caper of 2016 at Eastridge High School, but their punishment was overruled.

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COMMENTARY