

For grieving students, parents ‘listening’

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Handwritten signs and red and black ribbons dot the landscape along the paths of the Penfield High School complex. “We will get through this together,” read one sign. “Believe in one another,” read another sign.

It is part of the community and the school’s way of healing after a high school freshman took her own life earlier this month. There have been four teen suicides in the community within the past 16 months and students, faculty and parents are looking to find ways to heal.

That’s why an initiative called Penfield Strong has been launched to let students know that people are there for them, said Laura Griffith, parent of a sophomore and senior at Penfield High.

“Penfield has been hit relatively hard,” Griffith said.

Penfield Strong is a parent-led initiative to show the students that this parent community is there for them and can all come together and show our love and support, Griffith said. The past few months have been difficult for students coping with grief, she said.

An Instagram page called Penfield Strong has already been launched by a Penfield High School student. Together, “We can show we are listening and we support making Penfield Strong,” Griffith said.

Parents and students are using social media to get the word out to the community. The black and red ribbons represent Penfield’s school colors. The movement isn’t meant to be about mental illness, bullying or drugs, but about a community coming together.

The Penfield Central School District is extremely grateful for the outpouring of support, Nancy Bradstreet, director of communications for the district, said in a statement.

“Students and staff members at Penfield High School and Bay Trail Middle School were greeted with red and black ribbons (our school colors) and inspirational messages of love, support and hope from our parents,” the statement said. “We truly appreciate their efforts and know that by working together, the Penfield Schools community will continue to be Penfield Strong.”

The school district is holding an open community forum from 7 to 9 pm Thursday in the high school auditorium to discuss how to support students and families at this time of loss. The evening will include a brief overview of social programs and supports, followed by an opportunity for questions and concerns.

It has been a very emotional week at the school following the loss of one of their own, said senior Bronwen Pelish.

“We’re just at a loss for words after everything that’s happened,” said Pelish, 18.

The events at Penfield High has brought her family of four together, she said. And the Penfield Strong movement shows that the community is behind the students all the way.

“They do have an eye out for us and they do want what’s best for us,” Pelish said.

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Ribbons envelop a sign at Penfield High School as the community and school heal after a high school freshman took her life.

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