

Who Failed Phoebe Prince?

High school was hell for 15-year-old Phoebe Prince, but it didn't have to be deadly.

By **ALYSSA GIACOBBE**

SUPERINTENDENT GUS SAYER ISSUED the recorded message directly to all students and staff by 9:45 p.m., a feeble attempt at outrunning the South Hadley High School rumor mill. "On Thursday afternoon, we received the heartbreaking news that one of our freshman students died unexpectedly..." he said. But the town of South Hadley just isn't that big. Many people already knew that Phoebe Prince was dead.

And by Friday's student-run candlelight vigil, held on the SHHS softball field, the local papers were reporting what students had known for weeks: School, for Phoebe, had become beyond miserable. "Teenager Bullied to Death," the headlines would read, and "...Phoebe Prince, 15, Suspected of Committing Suicide Because of Bullying."

During the following days, before the increasing presence of news cameras and reporters became something for residents of this Springfield suburb to dread and disavow, several students spoke candidly about bullying, almost as if it's a fact of life. "A lot of people say stuff anonymously...so you don't even know who's saying it," junior Becky Brouillard told one NBC affiliate, referring to texting and online posts. "They can talk over a keyboard but they'll never say it to your face." At school the next day, one of the teens who would later be accused of tormenting Phoebe slammed Becky's head, not so anonymously, into a locker.

THEY CALL IT THE HAPPY VALLEY. The 'burbs of Springfield lie in the shadow of the Holyoke and Tom mountain ranges and host the "Five Colleges": Amherst, Hampshire,

Smith, UMass Amherst, and Mount Holyoke. South Hadley, home of the last, is a resolutely middle-class, predominantly white town of 17,000 bordering the Connecticut River, and is one of the least pretentious among its neighbors. Most people live in South Hadley either because they have roots there or work at the college. “South Hadley is a nice, friendly place to live,” says Jennifer Carleton, a real estate paralegal and mother of two who has lived in the town her entire life. “Most of us were born here and chose to have a family here. We’re invested in keeping it a good place to be.” Carleton, like many locals, learned about Phoebe’s death before it made the news — her sister-in-law once lived in the apartment the Prince family rented.

South Hadley has also been an enclave for Irish immigrants. Phoebe and her 12-year-old sister, Lauren, moved there in August from the Irish seaside village of Fanore with their mom, American-born Anne O’Brien Prince. Anne’s husband, Jeremy, a gardener, stayed behind with the older children, Bridget, Tessa, and Simon. It’s not clear what prompted the move. “Anne and Jeremy wanted to give their daughters a whole different experience, in a positive way,” says Darby O’Brien, a family friend and SHHS parent who came forward in the aftermath of Phoebe’s death to speak about the Princes. “South Hadley is a very comforting community for people from Ireland.”

Yet the story that some tell is that Phoebe’s parents were separating, and that Anne had retreated to the U.S. to be near her sister, Eileen, who lives in Springfield with her husband, John, and their two children. Anne rented a duplex on Newton Street in South Hadley, got a job as a junior high English teacher, and bought the girls a small white dog.

At first, Phoebe seemed to enjoy being the new girl among a group of teenagers who had known each other for most of their lives. She was beautiful: pale and petite, with wavy brown hair, a wide smile, and expressive blue eyes. She dressed for fun and in full color; she liked T-shirts and miniskirts. And the accent — the other kids were always trying to get her to say something so they could hear the lovely lilt. “Phoebe was undeniably gorgeous,” says Eadaoin Larkin, a close girlfriend back home in Ireland. “She had a great sense of humor, she was fun to be around, she was a very smart girl, and she was very passionate.... Girls envied her.” Boys, says Eadaoin, loved everything about her.

“She got popular quick,” says friend Tara Berard, a South Hadley freshman. “All the guys wanted to talk to Phoebe. Everyone wanted to talk to Phoebe.” Phoebe went with her new friends to football games and movies. She listened to techno music and joked about how everyone in Ireland smells like cabbage. She talked of starting a school rugby team. “Phoebe had an opinion of everything; she was one of the smartest people I’ve ever met,” says friend Katie Gingras, a fellow freshman. “She thought the U.S. was one of the best places, but I know she missed all of her friends in Ireland a lot, too.”

A couple of months into the fall semester, Phoebe began a brief relationship with Sean Mulveyhill, a senior who captained the football team and was a local sports legacy. Popular and accustomed to female attention, Sean was something of a score. He had dated (and some say never stopped dating) Kayla Narey, a pretty blond junior, herself a star athlete. Shortly before Phoebe’s 15th birthday, in November, Sean reunited with Kayla, and suddenly Phoebe found herself on the wrong side of the popular crowd.

That’s when the name-calling began, according to the authorities, who conducted a three-month investigation into Phoebe’s death. *Stupid bitch, Irish slut, Irish whore, ho. Fucking ho.* “Close your legs,” Ashley Longe, a round-faced junior, allegedly spat. For more than two months, the comments came almost daily. Phoebe’s once-cheerful gait along her regular route — through the library, past the cafeteria, and out the heavy metal front doors toward home — soon became a shuffle. She laughed less and less, for fear of attracting even more attention. “Whore,” authorities say Ashley called out. “I hate stupid sluts.”

Ashley and Sean had been friends since childhood. Though they had never dated, Ashley was proud of their friendship. And unlike Kayla, a high-honors student and all-star field hockey player, Ashley did have something to prove. She was average. She was never going to be as pretty or smart as either Kayla or Phoebe.

Flannery Mullins, a high-honors sophomore and decorated equestrienne, soon had some business of her own with Phoebe. Phoebe had been talking, maybe more, to Flannery’s sometime-boyfriend, junior Austin Renaud. Flannery began to corner Phoebe in the bathrooms and chase her through the halls, yelling “Irish slut” and warning Phoebe

to stay away from her boyfriend, authorities say. She was overheard saying “that freshman Phoebe girl” “should get her ass kicked.” Flannery’s best friend, Sharon Chanon Velazquez, a junior, offered to punch Phoebe in the face.

PHOEBE HAD NEVER BEEN quiet or shy — Katie remembers the day she wore a corset to school and “didn’t care what other people said about her” — but she was the new girl at an age when social groups are fluid and friendships fickle, when fitting in is too often the only way to survive. She was scared. She wasn’t tough, she confided to a friend, and she didn’t know how to fight. Between classes, she started ducking into bathroom stalls or walking down the middle of the hallway surrounded by a few friends as a shield. Most days, she cried as she made her way to and from her locker. Everyone saw.

“I remember taking attendance and a bunch of the kids said that Phoebe was having some trouble so she was at the counselor’s office,” says Cindy Kele, a South Hadley substitute teacher. “They said it like it was a matter of fact, like everyone knew and she was there all the time.” Kele believed it, too. She knew firsthand how these kids could be: Her own daughter, a student at the middle school, had recently been harassed by SHHS girls after being invited to a high school dance.

Phoebe’s harassment happened outside school, too, in ways that must have made her feel even more defenseless. *I used to like Irish girls*, Flannery reportedly posted to Facebook one day in late winter. *Now I know that some of them are slutty*. Similar invectives appeared on students’ MySpace pages, and on the anonymous Q&A site Formspring, and in Craigslist’s “rants and raves.” Phoebe’s cell number became public information, and the hateful words found their way to her via text: *slut, bitch, cunt*. She’d change her number; the bullies would get that, too.

On January 7, a teacher overheard a threat against Phoebe during gym class, and reported it to the front office. The student was “disciplined appropriately,” the school would later say. This student was Flannery, according to authorities. The next day in the cafeteria, Sharon, Flannery’s best friend, yelled at Phoebe about Flannery and repeatedly called her a “ho,” authorities would say; Phoebe reported her to an assistant principal, who sent Phoebe back to class while he handled another matter. When Sharon then

followed Phoebe into Latin class and continued to harass her, Phoebe started weeping, but managed to collect herself before class began, authorities would say. The school suspended Sharon for a day.

School “has been close to intolerable lately,” Phoebe texted a friend the next week. By now it was Wednesday, January 13. Phoebe told her friend she’d been accused of “taking away” another girl’s boyfriend, that the threats were getting physical, and that even Sean and his friends wouldn’t leave her alone. She had been to see the SHHS adjustment counselor, Sally Watson-Menkel, as well as the school nurse.

The following day in the school library, Phoebe looked up to see Ashley, Kayla, and Sean across the room. Ashley loudly taunted her while the reunited couple made a big show of groping and kissing, authorities say. Beside Phoebe’s name on the library sign-in sheet, someone had penciled in “Irish bitch...is a cunt.”

After school, Phoebe walked past a group of students who’d gathered outside the auditorium. They buzzed with end-of-day energy and talked about the school’s winter cotillion, which was scheduled for Saturday night. “Here she comes,” Sean reportedly told Ashley, nodding in Phoebe’s direction. “Whore,” Ashley allegedly shouted on cue as Phoebe passed. The crowd fell silent. “Whore,” Sean said. Ashley said, “Why don’t you just open your legs?” Kayla started to laugh. Phoebe kept on moving.

Home was a half-mile away, along well-trafficked Newton Street. Just beyond school grounds, a car slowed alongside Phoebe as she walked. From the passenger seat, authorities say Ashley hurled an empty energy-drink can. Phoebe, crying, kept walking. “Whore!” Ashley yelled, as the car sped off.

AROUND 4:30 P.M., Lauren Prince, 12, came home from school to find Phoebe hanging by a scarf from a beam in the apartment’s stairwell, dressed in the clothes she’d worn to school. The orange scarf was the one Lauren had given Phoebe for Christmas.

“When I first found out, I didn’t know how to react. I was in shock,” says Katie, who had last

seen Phoebe only hours earlier, at her locker. “See you tomorrow,” Phoebe had said.

Yet Katie understood Phoebe’s unhappiness: She, too, had been bullied at school and knew the feeling of “everybody hating on us; that’s why we were so close.” She says, “At South Hadley, for me it was hell,” and describes being verbally attacked and slammed against lockers. “We could talk about the same thing.... I knew things were not good [with Phoebe], but I didn’t know really how bad they were.”

Phoebe’s enemies didn’t share Katie’s despair. The word around town is that upon hearing the news, one of them merely laughed. Sharon was later overheard saying that she wasn’t the only one who caused Phoebe to kill herself, authorities say, and actually, she didn’t care that Phoebe was dead. Some were seen making gestures that mimicked hanging from a noose.

On January 18, before Phoebe’s body was to be shipped to Ireland, the family held a private funeral with an open casket; Phoebe wore the black sequined dress she had bought for the cotillion. The dance went on as planned, 48 hours after her death. As Phoebe’s mother and sister prepared to move out of the Newton Street house and into Eileen and John’s home in Springfield, hundreds of kids arrived at the Log Cabin in Holyoke in limos, wearing tuxes and jewel-tone dresses. Sean, a diamond stud in each ear, was seen laughing, while one student was reportedly overheard telling friends she “played dumb to the police.”

Four days after the dance — and nearly a week after Phoebe went home and hanged herself — principal Dan Smith sent parents a detailed letter concerning the suicide. He noted that Phoebe had had many close friends and had been “smart and charming,” and also “complicated.” He explained that local and state police investigators would be looking into the role that bullying might have played. The school would lead its own thorough questioning, of course, he said. Administrators also would reexamine policies regarding the handling of bullying, including cyberbullying, both inside and outside of school.

South Hadley had a no-tolerance policy, with disciplinary consequences that included

expulsion, says Sayer, the superintendent. The problem was, bullying had not been defined — it was up to the principal to determine what constituted it. Likewise, punishment was at the discretion of the principal or assistant principals. Like many schools across the United States post-Columbine, South Hadley had worked to implement student-wellness programs and school safety precautions — the top-heavy administration, the adjustment counselor, a plainclothes cop. It had been a start. It had not been enough.

In his letter, Smith announced the formation of an anti-bullying task force that would draft new regulations for addressing student misbehavior. Assistant superintendent Christine Sweklo invited Colorado-based Barbara Coloroso, author of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* and an expert on nonviolent conflict resolution, to speak to the community. Coloroso held an all-day workshop with SHHS students, who seemed, she says, exceedingly distressed. “The biggest concern that students expressed to me was that no adults were taking this seriously and that kids had to be accountable,” says Coloroso.

Coloroso had been to South Hadley before — in September, following the death of 11-year-old Carl Walker-Hoover, who had hanged himself the previous April, after enduring bullying at his charter school in Springfield. “South Hadley didn’t want [what happened to Carl] to happen in their community,” says Coloroso. Parents were given only a day’s notice, however, and attendance was low. When she returned to South Hadley after Phoebe’s death, Coloroso found the high school had failed to implement any of the changes she suggested on her first visit, including establishing a clearly defined policy on bullying, disciplinary measures, and a system that made it safe for students to report aggressors.

“If Phoebe’s situation had been handled properly at the beginning, I believe she would not have killed herself,” Coloroso says. “Suicide is complicated, so we can’t know that for sure. But I can guarantee the last few months of Phoebe’s life would have been far more pleasant and she *probably* would not have killed herself.... There’s always intent to harm in bullying. You tell a kid, ‘You’re a slut and a whore and no one wants to be around you,’ and that’s how she starts to feel.”

For many parents, a task force was nothing more than a bunch of buck-passing — too little, too late. They wanted accountability. They demanded expulsions, and that administrators be fired — or arrested. The last thing they wanted was a task force. “This is what [administrators] do,” says Jennifer Carleton, the lifelong South Hadlian. “They form a committee, and then a subcommittee. Then they go around in circles, and then the issue dies.”

Inaction has seemed to plague South Hadley for years. Susan Smith, whose son Nick is a sophomore there, says her niece was forced to transfer to another school after being bullied at SHHS. “She was in the principal’s office, like, every day,” Smith says. “My sister had to sell her house and move.” Three months after Phoebe’s death, Smith was frustrated that there was still no bullying plan in place. “They’re not doing the job; they’re not even answering questions,” she says of administrators.

At the school committee meetings that followed the suicide, citizens were allowed to speak, but Sayer, Smith, and committee chairman Ed Boisselle would not tolerate questions. Citing privacy laws, the administrators refused to tell parents even whether the suspected bullies — whose identities, by now, were all over town and on the Internet — still attended SHHS. They did. No one had been suspended, expelled, or even given detention, and all had been allowed to attend the dance. Four of the six would later transfer to another school or drop out, which kept their academic record technically clean.

More SHHS parents began telling stories publicly about how their own kids had been bullied. The increasingly common refrain: School officials had done nothing. Slowly, additional victims came forward. A former SHHS student, using the pseudonym “RJ” and a distorted image, posted a YouTube video detailing four years of torment by a “very popular” girl. “Most of that could have been avoided if it weren’t for neglect by teachers and staff,” he says. “Neglect is a strong word, but there’s no other word for this refusal to intervene.” He blames SHHS guidance counselors for taking a work-it-out stance and teachers for ignoring blatant attacks. He says most adults sided with the girl who bullied him because she was pretty and had lots of friends, and that when he asked an adult for help, “he looked at me and shrugged. And he said, ‘I’m doing the best I can.’ He had done absolutely nothing.” Others, he says, treated him as if he were simply being whiny and

overreactive.

In Phoebe's case, administrators have so far pleaded ignorance. Smith, the principal, and Watson-Menkel, the adjustment counselor, declined to comment for this story.

Superintendent Sayer told me in March, "Unfortunately, we learned about [Phoebe being bullied] too late. Had we known about it earlier, we would have intervened.... There was some chatter at lunch tables among kids but not within earshot of any adults in the building or staff. No one came forward to tell the principal." He added, "[Phoebe] was a very private person."

Sayer soon revised this, but only slightly. "School administrators first learned of the bullying by one group of students on January 7 and then acted immediately to discipline those students," he said in an April 14 press release. "Unfortunately, the school administrators did not learn of bullying by a second group of students until after Phoebe's death. Tragically, Phoebe Prince herself did not make known to school officials the full extent of the bullying that was tormenting her." His attempts at clarification came only after Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel indicted Ashley, Sean, Kayla, Flannery, Austin, and Sharon on felonies that could send them to prison; she called their behavior toward Phoebe "conduct [that] far exceeded the limits of normal teenage relationship-related quarrels."

Meanwhile, Phoebe was still under attack. A "We Murdered Phoebe Prince" page appeared on Facebook, her photograph altered to show knives plunged into her eyes. And until Facebook removed it, her own personal page accumulated sinister comments such as "she deserved it" and "mission accomplished." On Craigslist, someone wrote, "If she fucked two boys in 2 months at fifteen, she was a slut. Who here thinks that was a good idea?" Empowered by anonymity, haters had found a way to bully even a dead girl.

WHAT SAYER AND HIS ADMINISTRATORS have failed to acknowledge is how incredibly difficult it can be for a victimized student to come forward at all. The appearance of tattling can anger bullies further and encourage retaliation, says Coloroso. Often, a victim is embarrassed to admit to parents or teachers that he or she is not liked. Mitch Brouillard,

Becky's father, says his daughter had endured bullying for a long time before she would admit it. "She was always an A student, but we saw that declining," he says. "We kept asking her what was wrong, but she was reluctant to tell us."

Ultimately, Brouillard learned Becky was bullied "relentlessly" for various reasons, including being friends with a boy another girl liked and, later, for speaking out in the aftermath of Phoebe's death. Fake Facebook profiles were created in her name. "We went through the days of 'I'm sick, I'm not going to school,' and I now have a guilty feeling about pushing her to go," Brouillard says, "like I was offering her up almost as [a] sacrifice."

He's hoping for stricter penalties and is glad schools are starting to keep better records of bullying incidents. And while the student who slammed his daughter against the locker that day was suspended, Brouillard takes little comfort. "I am disturbed," he admits. "If this didn't happen to Phoebe, would my daughter's harassment have been recognized? I'm not so confident it would have."

Reporting bullies requires a level of trust between students and their teachers and administrators; fostering that trust and maintaining a safe environment is the responsibility of the many adults in the school, whether they directly witness violations or not. Some parents have questioned the role of Todd Dineen, the plainclothes cop whose job is described as the liaison among the police department, schools, and courts. South Hadley police Chief David LaBrie says Dineen was not made aware of any bullying activity regarding Phoebe.

Dineen maintains an office in the high school and divides his time among there, the middle school, and the elementary schools; sometimes, he's required to appear in court. Dineen says he was friendly with Phoebe, but that she never reported problems with classmates. He believes she would have felt comfortable enough with him to do so. "Whenever I saw her, she had people around her," he says. "Some kids you see sitting alone in the lunchroom and it just breaks your heart. She wasn't like that." Dineen also says kids often use language with one another that, as a father of two daughters, he finds inappropriate. "You hear one girl saying, 'Hey, bitch,' to another and you stop them and they say, 'Oh, no, it's okay — we're friends.'"

Paul Mihalik, a retired Holyoke cop who lives next to SHHS, says that three years ago he went to the principal to voice his concerns about the behavior he saw in kids who passed by his house. They were rough with one another; they littered. And the language: *Shit* this, and *fuck* that. One kid put a used condom in his mailbox. “Principal Smith said he had very little time for me,” Mihalik says. “He said he’d get back to me, but he never did.”

For Phoebe’s friend Katie, the bullying got so bad that she says she, too, considered suicide. “Phoebe told me nothing was worth taking my life over,” she says. “We were like sisters going through the same things, but Phoebe was the strong one.” Katie says administrators knew she was being targeted — “I went to them crying” — but did nothing. She now attends a different school.

TWO AND A HALF MONTHS after Phoebe’s death, the felony indictments came down. Sean and Kayla, both 17, and Austin, 18, will be tried as adults, while 16-year-old Ashley, Flannery, and Sharon will be tried as juveniles. Sean faces charges of statutory rape, violation of civil rights, criminal harassment, and disturbance of school assembly. Kayla: violation of civil rights, criminal harassment, and disturbance of school assembly. Austin: statutory rape. Ashley: violation of civil rights. Flannery and Sharon: violation of civil rights and stalking. All have denied the charges.

“The investigation revealed relentless activity directed toward Phoebe designed to humiliate her and to make it impossible for her to remain at school,” Scheibel said in a press conference. She called the actions or inactions of some adults at South Hadley “troublesome,” but not criminal. While Principal Smith’s investigation is now complete, which means that any punishments coming from the school have been doled out, Scheibel’s is still under way.

Sayer, whose 14-year run as Amherst’s school superintendent ended amid controversy involving a principal accused of making inappropriate comments to a young male student, was on vacation at the time of Scheibel’s announcement. Weeks later, he said the DA’s investigation “was, of course, more extensive and had access to resources not available

to the schools, especially messages left behind on Phoebe's cell phone and Facebook pages, along with comments made upon them by students." Yet Scheibel has said one of the more significant challenges her team faced was the "inexplicable lack of cooperation from Internet service providers, in particular Facebook and Craigslist." In any case, she said, while social media played a part, the assault on Phoebe largely represented old-fashioned, in-your-face bullying.

Since Phoebe's death Sayer has received hundreds of angry e-mails, he says. Death threats, too. Facebook groups like "I Do Not Support Superintendent Gus Sayer" and "We Want Resignations" have appeared. "These guys can't handle tough situations," says Darby O'Brien, the Prince family friend. "If this had been a prominent kid, a well-connected family, they'd have canceled that dance. But she was what the Irish call a come-over. I think they just thought, 'This will go away.'" (Sayer says the winter cotillion went on as planned because it was too late to cancel.)

The harshest backlash has been reserved for the accused bullies. Lawyers for Kayla and Sharon say their clients have been the subject of physical and verbal threats. "Sean Mulveyhill Is a Coward Piece of Shit" is a Facebook group that at press time, in early May, had 1,494 fans — twice the size of the entire student body at South Hadley High. For a few weeks, an anonymous cybervigilante maintained websites in the accused girls' names, their school photos appearing above statements like "This is a piece of shit, bullying whore who should not be walking this earth. I hope someday she has a daughter and everyone bullies her to death. See how she likes it. If you see this worthless piece of crap on the streets, throw things at her, spit on her, call her names, give her back what she has been dealing to others."

The defendants' attorneys, meanwhile, are looking at Phoebe. Terrence Dunphy, the Springfield lawyer representing Austin, has filed a motion requesting the names of any physicians, psychologists, or rape counselors Phoebe saw, or any details of prior allegations of rape or sexual abuse. O'Brien has alleged that Sayer told people Phoebe tried to kill herself in Ireland (Sayer denies this), and that a female teacher was overheard telling colleagues at a conference that Phoebe had tried to slit her wrists and had slept with the entire football team. At one point Governor Deval Patrick told a radio station that in

the case of Phoebe Prince, “the adults don’t seem to have acted like adults.”

SUSAN WILSON, WHOSE SON BEN is an SHHS freshman, in March cohosted a benefit for the Prince family at Adelfia, a South Hadley restaurant and function hall. Phoebe’s friend Cliodhna Shannon flew in from Ireland and sang Taylor Swift’s “Breathe” for a crowd of more than 200. Wilson says not a single school administrator showed up.

The \$7,000 that was raised from benefit ticket sales and raffles went entirely to the Princes. O’Brien says Phoebe’s mother and sister want to remain in South Hadley, though now four of the Prince children are back in Ireland, one in a casket. In April, the Princes retained Springfield attorney Rebecca Bouchard, a high school teacher turned attorney who specializes in advocating for children who are victims of abuse. Bouchard did not respond to requests for comment.

As for Sayer, his contract was due to expire at the end of this month, but in April the South Hadley School Committee voted unanimously to extend it. Boisselle, meanwhile, stepped down as committee chairman, though not, he says, because of anything to do with Phoebe. He remains on the board.

Not long ago, SHHS’s new task force invited Jim McCauley and Larry Berkowitz from the Riverside Trauma Center in Needham to speak to parents about recognizing suicidal tendencies in teenagers. “Ninety to 95 percent of suicides betray underlying issues,” Berkowitz told the crowd of about 80. “But at the same time, it’s entirely preventable.”

At that meeting, Smith reassured parents that the school encourages students to talk to counselors, pairs kids in a sort of buddy system, and tries to “provide the greatest support that we can.” A new anti-bullying policy will go into effect in September at SHHS, though the task force is still deciding what, exactly, the policy will entail.

Until this spring, Massachusetts was one of only nine states without a law against bullying or requiring schools to regulate it. In late April, lawmakers approved a measure requiring staff to report bullying incidents and principals to investigate them. Teachers and administrators now must undergo training that would help them recognize and

respond to bullying. It's up to the principal whether to report incidents to the police. While a step forward, the law could be strengthened with provisions like those in other states.

In Georgia, for instance, administrators must get victims out of harm's way by transferring a bully to another school after three offenses in one school year. In Ohio, schools are required to give parents access to any written records about incidents involving their child. Such measures come at a time when American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry statistics show that half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, and at least 10 percent endure it regularly. More than 160,000 children stay home from school daily because of bullying, according to National Education Association estimates. "How are you supposed to concentrate in math class when you're trying to figure out how to get to English safely?" Coloroso says.

"Ultimately, parents have to be on top of what's happening. Say, 'You don't want to snitch? I'll snitch for you.' We adults have to have some role. Kids cannot do this all on their own."

By the time fall semester starts, it's conceivable that the DA's investigation into Phoebe Prince's final days will have gotten to the bottom of who knew what. This includes the parents of the accused teenagers.

In the meantime, Coloroso, for one, can say straight up how all of this might have been prevented and how Phoebe might now be alive to enjoy her summer break. First, the bullying simply never should have happened; second, anyone who witnessed the bullying should have reported it; finally, "anyone in a position of authority," whether they saw offensive behavior or not, should have intervened, disciplined the offenders, and notified parents.

"It is risky to stand up," Coloroso says. But as she told South Hadley students that day in late January, bullying is not a rite of passage, or something that all kids do; it's an entirely unnecessary evil.

"Ultimately, parents have to be on top of what's happening," she says. "Say, 'You don't want to snitch? I'll snitch for you.' We adults have to have some role. Kids cannot do this all on their own."