

BRYAN NAELITZ SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a senior at Marion L. Steele High School in Amherst. He is first in his class and serves as Science Olympiad team captain and vice president of National Honor Society. Bryan follows his passion for medical and biological science by working as a research fellow at Cleveland Clinic Lutheran Hospital and plans a medical career as a hematologist/oncologist. He has been accepted to Washington University in St. Louis.

“Watch your step retard!” they yelled as they tripped Maggie*, knocking her headfirst into the uncaring brick wall. She fell to her knees, looked at her tormenters, and immediately broke down. Tears welled up in her defenseless eyes as she questioned why this happened to her, why she had to endure the torture of public humiliation. Yet, her attackers did not relent: “Learn how to walk retard!” they laughed as they walked away, giving her no more attention than the crumpled up pieces of paper that lay next to her on the dirty floor. Many students walked by her. No one acted; no one took a second out of their lives to help this innocent victim who was bullied because she was in special education. Tears still streaming down her cheeks, I ran over to help her. I found her student aide and Maggie quickly felt better, but I knew that the deeper problem of unprovoked hatred remained.

Maggie’s attack was outright grotesque and wholly unforgivable. Yet, for me, it became a life-changing experience that exposed me to the reality of my high school environment. This display of hatred opened my eyes to the infectious poison of discrimination that pervaded my classmates. Eagerly, they would ostracize others, giddily identifying the differences that made their fellow students ‘insignificant’. Unfortunately, special education students were their chief victims. Because they weren’t the carbon copy of a ‘normal’ person, they became plagued by chronic hatred that devalued them to an unwarranted subhuman level. Idly watching my classmates’ hatred wasn’t accomplishing anything; in fact, by doing nothing, I was enabling their actions. It was time to take a stand.

With the full support of National Honor Society, I can lead a campaign that will end discrimination. After being elected Vice President of NHS, entering a partnership with Special Olympics became a top priority. By assisting with special education student dances, fundraising activities, and sporting events, National Honor Society sets a standard for all other students to follow. We demonstrate that embracing the differences that historically set us apart are of no importance. We are proving that it is what we share—learning, friendship, and competition—that ultimately brings us together.

I will make sure no special education student faces discrimination. I plan on utilizing my high school’s television news program to promote my campaign against the derogatory term ‘retard’, so that no one experiences the degradation and helplessness Maggie felt. I will appear on the daily news cast to address my 1400 other classmates and I will educate; I will explain how incredibly perverse and unacceptable hate and discrimination are. I will then lead a school-wide campaign by pledging to “Spread the Word to End the R-Word” and encourage others to do the same.

Words are hateful and indelible. They promote violence, anger, and even death. Ironically, words can also be used to make peace and correct past mistakes. Slowly, yet surely, I am using my voice to end discrimination.

**Name has been changed*