

Community uplifts English teacher Steve Lavelle

Lavelle said students, staff saved his life during medical emergency

By Erin Loh

Throughout his medical recovery process, English teacher Steve Lavelle said he has received numerous expressions of appreciation and concern from the HHS community. Lavelle said the quick actions of students and staff saved his life when he suffered cardiac arrest during tutorial Feb. 2. Now recovering, Lavelle hopes to return to teaching sometime this month.

"I think they're all miracle workers," Lavelle said. "I've had so much outpouring of well-wishes and love from the community. I'm very touched by it and feel extremely grateful."

Giglio said the medical emergency prompted reflection amongst staff members around plans of action in emergency situations. For example, a staff discussion resulted in the realization that teamwork had been critical to the success of the task.

Students in Lavelle's tutorial initiated the immediate response when they realized something was seriously wrong and sought help across the hall from resource teacher Eileen Jones, who called 911. Giglio said he, health clerk Dan Yusim and student conduct liaison Louise Garces communicated with the 911 responder, performed CPR and administered an AED while waiting for the EMTs to arrive.

Giglio said administrators are trained in medical emergency response procedures every few years, however teachers are not. Jones said after Lavelle's medical emergency, becoming confident in administering CPR became more important to her.

"I would not have felt capable of administering CPR by myself, even though I have had some training in the past," Jones said. "I do think it's really useful to have, and for me, it's a confidence piece — 'Do I feel like I can rise to this situation and administer a life saving technique like that?'"

Giglio said the school's mental health team has been checking in with Lavelle's students, especially those more vulnerable to emotional triggers. Staff have also been sup-

ported in processing trauma from the event.

"It hit me what was going on, and I'd get emotional," Giglio said. "I think each one of us sort of broke down at one point or another, just upset about it."

Sophomore Isabella Segovia said she was one of the students who sought help from Jones and office administrators during the emergency.

"My adrenaline was up. Oh my god, it was crazy," Segovia said. "When I got home, that's when I shed my tears. It was scary, and I still have PTSD from it."

Segovia said Lavelle has taught her and her peers about respecting, loving and accepting those around them.

"The energy that he has in general, like him being super nice and very welcoming and not being too harsh on everyone, is the best [energy] in a teacher that you could ever have," Segovia said. "I love the vibe in [his classroom]."

Lavelle said his family held a lunch at HHS to thank the staff for their swift, life-saving action. Currently, he said he is recovering well and is being treated with an automatic implantable cardioverter-defibrillator to help regulate his heartbeat. As he regains his health at home, Lavelle said he has missed his students.

"I'm in it for the kids," Lavelle said. "I enjoy getting out of the house and being able to come to work, not that it ever feels like a job. I'm so blessed to be a teacher."

Giglio said Lavelle's kindness, sense of humor and commitment to his students have made a strong impact on the HHS community.

"You realize how much people mean to you, and it's unfortunate that it takes something like this to wake people up [and remind them] 'Oh, I

need to go hug my wife today,' or 'I need to be nicer to those people,'" Giglio said.

Additionally, Jones said working together to successfully handle Lavelle's medical emergency was a bonding experience for students and staff.

"I was so amazed at how the students responded. Everybody pulled together super well," Jones said. "Knowing that he is going to be back on his feet is phenomenal — I can't even describe the joy."

Coming out of the incident, Lavelle said he is thankful for the loving community that has supported him.

"The HHS community is one of action and great help. I consider myself lucky to be alive." With a laugh, and in typical Lavelle fashion, he said, "It was a heart-stopping experience."

LETTERS OF APPRECIATION:

Segovia said Lavelle's students made a box where anyone can drop off letters for their teacher.

