

## Expert continues discussion on teens and screen time

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CANTON — A familiar face came to town to discuss an all too familiar topic faced by parents — technology and the amount of time their children are interacting with screens.

Michael Shelby, principal with Shall Be, LLC, was in town last spring to share with parents the movie "Screenagers," which addressed this topic and was asked back to help parents further in developing techniques to address the amount of time screens take up in a person's day.

"I was deeply touched. He was so well received," Assistant Superintendent of Schools Jordan Grossman told the crowd, which included parents as

well as their children.

"One of the things that was asked was to bring Michael Shelby back," Grossman said.

Before Shelby's talk began Nov. 9, as the audience came in to the Canton High School auditorium, children sat in one section and their parents in the other. This would later prove helpful when Shelby asked parents questions, and giving both sides, children and parents, the opportunity to show their different perspectives on the issue, which often was in opposition to one another.

"Thank you very much for your trust in me," Shelby began.

Shelby shared information on how pervasive screens are, including how Facebook has 2 billion users and is the third

most visited website on the planet.

While computers and tablets are one thing, then there is the phone, which essentially is a small computer as it has internet access and is often just as accessible as any other device, perhaps even more so. Because phones are carried everywhere with the user, the potential to use this device more and for bad reasons increases, including such things as sexting or cyber bullying others.

Shelby said 43 percent of teens ages 13 to 17 have reported being exposed to some form of cyber bullying.

Another area of concern for parents is, and should be, the dark web, sometimes referred to as the deep web.

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The dark web is the area of the internet that is not in the public domain, all using the digital currency, Bitcoin.

"Ninety-six percent of the digital universe is on the deep web," Shelby said. "It's where things like this and this are for sale," he added pointing to images of assault rifles and drugs shown on a screen.

"Oh my God," whispered one mother in the audience upon hearing this.

There is help, Shelby assured parents.

"The most effective tool you have is between your ears — your mouth and your brain," Shelby said. "Talk to these guys," he continued, pointing to where the children were sitting.

"It is a dialogue," Shelby continued, "a dialogue these guys have to hear, but you have to listen."

Included in the discussion was a condensed version of the movie shown in the spring, "Screenagers," for the benefit of those who had not seen it earlier. Shelby encouraged those to view the movie in its entirety on their own, at screenagersmovie.com.

The film tells the story of parents who have wrestled with how to manage their family's screen time. It told the story of one college-aged student who was so addicted to playing video

games he dropped out of school and eventually went to rehabilitation. Another story shared how a family worked with their 13-year-old daughter when she received her first iPhone; this family gave her a several-page-long contract she had to adhere to. Eventually, the family changed the contract once the daughter convinced them to let her have some say in the details of the agreement.

The movie highlighted how kids spend an average of 6 1/2 hours on screens each day.

The movie also noted how the fault is not entirely with just the children, but how adults in their lives struggle with their own overuse of screens and perhaps model poor screen use behavior.

Following the brief movie showing, parents and children engaged in a discussion with Shelby.

Among the issues that were brought up were the use of a contract, privacy issues and whether parents should have access to their child's phone or device and whether not a phone should be kept in the bedroom overnight and just how connected people are, or are not, by being connected 24/7.

"That point is brought up a lot. It connects us," Shelby said. "This whole generation, they are digital



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jordan Grossman welcomes Michael Shelby back to town for another forum on the use of technology and children.

natives. They have never known a world without the internet. This is their playground, their social circle, this is how they connect, not by walking down the street to a friend and saying "Let's play."

Parents also shared how concerned they were with what is being shared, the competition, the bullying and the volume of information.

Perhaps the one issue that, at least for one parent, was the most upsetting was how much his children miss because of their constant use of a device.

"My worry is simple things are being lost," the parent said. "It is so much harder to appreciate the simple things in life."

There was also discussion on what kids post to one another and the concept of posting the best of themselves or the perceptions of what they want others to believe about themselves rather than reality.

"Are they being lost behind the screen?" Shelby asked, adding that the concept of IRL that kids use, or In Real Life, is one that device users have to grapple with.

"This is scaring me," admitted one mom in the audience about just how pervasive the use of screens have become. "What about real life connections, going for a walk, this day and age is making me sad."

The one reassuring thing students admitted was that they do put their phones down and walk away from their screens. Some said they play sports, others said they enjoy reading and others are active in clubs.

Ultimately, Shelby said the best way to combat all the negatives is to talk to your children about their use and let them know what your expectations for them are when it comes to using all the technology available to them, as the name of the event noted, "Let's Talk About Screen Time."

Grossman said he plans to have Shelby back this winter to discuss the topic of drug use.