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Jodee Blanco, author of "Please Stop Laughing At Me," speaks to Valparaiso High School students about bullying on Monday.

Focusing on bully problem

Valparaiso High School presentation features best-selling author

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VALPARAISO — Judging by the standing ovation Jodee Blanco received at Valparaiso High School Monday, her message about bullying got through to students.

After the convocation, some went up to talk with the activist and author of the best-selling "Please Stop Laughing at Me..." to say hello, get an autograph or hug and ask for advice.

This happens at most of her talks, where the one-time Hollywood publicist and "New York Times" best-seller list author talks about what happened to her during junior high and high school.

"It's my willingness to be vulnerable because kids feel vulnerable all the time," she said. "I'm doing on purpose what most of them try to hide."

She once stuck up for a handicapped boy who was

being pelted with dirt.

His harassers, popular kids like wrestlers and football players, pinned her down and forced snow down her throat until she vomited.

She also talked about suicide attempts, cutting herself all the time and being taken to a psychiatric ward by her mother, who had discovered a kitchen knife in her backpack that Blanco was planning to use for revenge.

That happened about 20 years before Columbine, almost to the day, she said.

"Most adults make it a point to be strong in front of kids," she said after her talk.

Amends for Blanco were finally made at a high school reunion.

"She really got through to me. I experienced things like that," junior Randi Wible said.

"I think it's going to help the school itself and maybe cut down on the bullying a little bit — at least, that's what I



Students raise their hands in recognition when author Jodee Blanco refers to Columbine.

hope will happen," freshman Joey Gottschlich said.

It was important, especially in light of the stabbing incident last year, junior Josh Jenkins said.

But whether it would have made a difference if the convocation was held before 15-

year-old James S. Lewerke allegedly slashed fellow students, he couldn't say.

"It might have," Jenkins said. "I'm not so sure."

Having Blanco speak wasn't a reaction to the Lewerke case, but a continuation of the school system's anti-bullying education, Principal Pat Weil said.

Valparaiso has made a commitment to the "Creating a Safe School" program, in its third year at the middle schools.

The high school has had mentoring for three years, which has expanded into the safe school program this year.

"Ironically, that incident had nothing to do with bullying at our school," Weil said. "There's no evidence to suggest that he (Lewerke) was bullied here."

Blanco's program alone won't stop bullying, Weil said.

"It's a message that constantly needs to be put in front of them."