



Reaching Higher Helps Students Make Positive Changes for a Brighter Future

By Ron Wilson

Within our district, I've seen a profound change among the high school and middle school students taking part in Reaching Higher, a leadership program that helps them make positive choices and changes in their lives.

Now in its second year at Howell High School, and first year at Parker and Highlander Way middle schools, the Reaching Higher program matches students with mentors who help them realize stronger academic achievement. The program also provides students greater self-esteem and conflict resolution skills, helps with social competence, and provides students with the ability to thrive in difficult or pressure situations. Twenty-five students are selected for each class and Howell Public Schools offers six classes per year.



"My goals are to become healthier, build better relationships, and reach my full potentials in school. My grades are the best they've been in a long time."

I have seen a profound impact on the students and their families. These were kids that were struggling in different relationships and with myriad problems. They found some real hope and real change.

Through the program, students meet with



"Learning to be myself and learning how to accept myself is the greatest gift. My future is as bright as the morning sun and now thanks to you I can walk head high into my greatest adventure called our future."

"Reaching Higher here at Howell High Schools has not only made a difference in the participating students, but the entire school."

group leaders and mentors for two hours, once a week for nine weeks. At the end of the nine weeks, the students celebrate with a graduation ceremony. Following their "graduation," the students stay in contact with their mentors and leaders through monthly meetings.

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Recently, Howell Public Schools staff received training to run the program so they are now able to work with the students and provide the program to the school. For the cost per student, this program is probably the most effective program I have seen in my nearly 30 years of education.

Program founder Susie Dahlmann, who was a teacher in the Walled Lake Schools for more than 25 years, said she decided to start the program to offer positive coaching and support to students.

"I wanted to show them how to build character and learn life skills," she said. "We tell kids we offer 'the power of hope and the skills to cope.'"

Through the Reaching Higher classes students build integrity, strong moral values, confidence, communication skills, and relationship skills.

"We provide the character-building skills and life skills that help the kids create a successful life," Dahlmann said.

For more information about the program visit reachinghigherinc.org.

Ron Wilson is superintendent of Howell Public Schools and a graduate of Cohort 4 of the Courageous Journey. Contact him at ron@howellschools.com.

Superintendents Lead Way Through Shifting Technological Education Landscape

By Mitch Smith

The new technology available for schools and classrooms has changed the way educators teach, how students learn, and the way districts communicate. An *Education Week* story recently featured a Michigan superintendent in a story about how this technology is shaping districts, and how it's changing the role of superintendents and other education leaders. David Britten, superintendent of Michigan's Godfrey-Lee School District, told *EdWeek* reporters about the shifting educational landscape that he has witnessed over the last five years in his district.

"In the past most communities were happy if the superintendent worked to maintain the status quo," believes Britten. "The new truth is that the superintendent's role is having to change to become more of an instigator of change, and technology plays a big role in that."

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Education Week also noted that today's district leader has to establish a long-term vision for a district that provides a path toward a digital conversion. They need to be taking a critical look at how the technology as a whole—from purchasing hardware and software, maintaining the infrastructure, and educational training on the technology—is to be used to its maximum potential.

It is crucial that superintendents have a good relationship with their technology directors, to make sure they are working together towards the same district vision with the implemented technology. District leaders need to have awareness that purchasing and distributing technology, such as iPads, also need long-term infrastructure support as well as training for the educators. Those educators that will be using the new technology need to know how to best use them to improve teaching.

The article also pointed to budget reductions that are also playing a larger role on the types of decisions that drive the implementation and purchase of technology. As an example, reworking a purchasing department or implementing and using new software to track how accurately food is needed and purchased for the nutrition services program, may lead to efficiencies that allow district resources to be shifted from operational support to student learning support. Wise use of technology, as well as communicating its use throughout the district, will ultimately lead to students graduating

with more of the necessary skills and experiences to compete and thrive in the new global economy.

You can read the full article in the October 2013 issue of *Education Week* under the title "K-12 Leadership Evolves to Meet Digital Priorities" or online at www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/10/02/06el-super.h33.html?qs=protectors+of+status+quo+to+change+agents

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