

@ HEALTH & WELL-BEING ISSUE

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Lakeview Junior/Senior High School Youth Volunteer Corps club members, School Liaison Joan Buswell and Principal William Hymes plan volunteer activities for the school year. Read more on Page 12.

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 THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION



The Rapides Foundation
2017 SYMPOSIUM



**ACCLAIMED AUTHOR
WES MOORE DELIVERS
MESSAGE OF HOPE TO
4,200 IN CENLA**

The Rapides Foundation brought acclaimed author Wes Moore to Central Louisiana for its fourth annual Symposium on September 6. Moore, a Rhodes scholar, decorated Army combat veteran, youth advocate and CEO of the Robin Hood Foundation, spoke about the transformative power of education and leadership and its impact on improving our community. He first brought his message to 3,500 school students at a morning event at the Rapides Parish Coliseum and then spoke before a group of 675 community members at the Riverfront Center.

The Symposium focuses on a topic of importance to Central Louisiana and is presented each September as a way of celebrating the anniversary of the Foundation's creation in September 1994. The focus of the 2017 Symposium was Transforming Communities.

Joe Rosier, President and CEO, said the Foundation's mission of improving the health status of Central Louisiana includes two critical components that contribute to the health of a community – educational attainment and civic leadership and engagement. For this reason, the Foundation focuses its work in three strategic areas to support this mission: Healthy People, Education and Healthy Communities. Directing his comments to students, Rosier said, "Find a place of service, find a place to contribute, both to your own self and to your family and your community."

In both presentations, Moore shared his personal story of overcoming adversity through education, embracing personal responsibility, and emerging as an inspirational leader. His moving life story is the subject of an upcoming motion picture from Executive Producer Oprah Winfrey based on Moore's New York Times best-seller, *The Other Wes Moore*. The book tells the story of

“ You cannot talk about education without talking about the importance of health in that conversation.

Wes Moore, CEO of the Robin Hood Foundation

how educational opportunities, strong parental influence, mentors and a community support network helped him transcend the fate of a man with the same name who lived just blocks away and took a tragically different path to prison.

Moore told the group he was "beyond humbled to be here," and praised the work of the Foundation. "When I first heard about the work of The Rapides Foundation, and when I heard about the focus on education, it made perfect sense. You cannot talk about education without talking about the importance of health in that conversation. At the same time you can't have a conversation about health if you don't also understand the role that education is going to play in it."

Moore lost his dad at a young age, leaving his mother to make sacrifices to provide for her children. She eventually moved the family from Baltimore to the Bronx to get help from her parents. "Almost immediately after I got there I found myself picking and choosing what days to go to school ... hurting the people that actually did love me so I could trust people who couldn't care less about me," Moore said. He was only 11 when he felt handcuffs on his wrists for the first time. When he was 13, his mother followed up on what he considered idle threats and sent him to military school.

"As soon as I arrived, I made it clear I wasn't going to stay," Moore said of his initial experience at military school. After several unsuccessful attempts to escape, he pleaded with his mother to take him home. "I started going through this whole list of things she needed to do to make my life easier. This is the woman who would sacrifice everything for her kids. I think my little sister said it best when she said, 'Our mother wore sweaters so we could wear coats.' And now I'm telling her what she has to do to make my life easier," he said. Eventually, Moore understood what his mother had been trying to explain – that there were many people who were sacrificing on his



Wes Moore brought his story of inspiration to Central Louisiana.

behalf and rooting for him.

Moore ending up thriving at military school, went on to college and received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, reserved for only 32 recipients a year. The same day the Baltimore Sun wrote a story about his accomplishment, it ran an article about four young Baltimore men accused – and later convicted – of killing an off-duty police sergeant in an armed robbery. One of the individuals was named Wes Moore.

The article made Moore question why two men who grew up in the same part of town with the same name and similar backgrounds could take such widely different paths. Moore ended up conversing with the “other” Wes Moore, who remains in prison serving a life sentence. Their correspondence and Moore’s research resulted in his famous best-seller.

“I share this story ... to help us remember how thin that line is between our life and someone else’s life,” he said. “The truth is there are Wes Moores that exist in every one of our communities. People who are one decision away, people who are one policy decision away, people who are a natural disaster away from going in one direction or going in a completely different direction -- people who every day are straddling the line of greatness and they don’t even know it. The fact is, our society is full of ‘others.’”

Addressing the 3,500 students in the Coliseum, Moore said, “Every single one of you are here because the expectations that people have of you are high. Every single one of you are here because there are people who love you and who believe in you and who want you to succeed, and there are people who want you to understand that your success will never simply be about how you did on a test or what your GPA is. Your success also comes back to a measure of understanding of what is it that you can do to help people understand the lives of other people better so we don’t have to continue having tragedies happen over and over.”

He urged both audiences to make their lives matter. “Whether it’s time to leave school, whether it’s time for you to leave your job, whether it’s time for you to leave your community, or whether it’s time for you to leave this planet,

make sure that it mattered that you were ever even here,” he said. “The truth is, none of us are promised anything. So while we’re here, let’s actually do something with it. When you see a human suffering, do something with it. When you see a chance to actually use your voice for something bigger, use it. Because there is nothing more powerful than you individually and collectively choosing to embrace how impactful you can be.”



IN HIS WORDS

ON THE GIFT OF EMPATHY

“There’s a difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is ‘I feel bad for you.’ Empathy is ‘your pain is also my pain.’ And there’s a different sense of urgency in how we address it. I want my children to understand that they have a distinct role to play in the world that we live in ... and that the world doesn’t revolve around them, but that the world doesn’t exist without them either. They have to take a clear sense of responsibility in helping to shape the environment that they call home. I want them to know that their sole goal has to be to leave this place a little better than the way they found it. And if they have done that they have done their job and I know I’ll be happy.”





Wes Moore greeted cadets from the Louisiana National Guard Youth Challenge Program after the community event.

ON THE BENEFITS OF AN EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

“You can take anything away from me, and the truth is that the one thing you will never take is not just what I learned through my education, but the confidence that it has given me. I know there is not a single room that I will ever walk into again and ever feel inadequate or ever feel like I don’t belong,” he said. “Education is not just the ultimate door opener, it is the thing that keeps you in the room. It’s the thing that makes people know that you belong there, and it’s the thing that changes your whole mind about your personal belonging of being there. Never again in my life will I feel like I am in that room because of someone’s social experiment. I’m in the room because I belong there.”

ON WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO TO INFLUENCE A YOUNG PERSON’S LIFE

“First, make sure you instill leadership in their lives and in their minds as early and as swiftly as possible. The educational process is about how they take that leadership and apply it out in the world. In the military they put you in charge of something and there’s a reason for that. There’s this graduated sense of responsibility that you get in the military, and that’s very intentional. If we can provide that platform in schools and that growth and that feeling of belonging and that sense of graduated responsibility, it’s amazing how they will perform.”



ASPIRING LEADERS

Program graduates Central Louisiana Educators

Twenty-two Central Louisiana educators are fully prepared for instructional leadership positions after completing a three-year training that is designed to ultimately impact student achievement. Aspiring Leaders is a leadership institute administered by The Orchard Foundation and funded under The Rapides Foundation’s Education Initiative. The Aspiring Leaders curriculum was developed specifically for Central Louisiana by the University of Washington’s Center for Educational Leadership.

The Rapides Foundation’s Education Initiative seeks to increase the level of educational attainment and achievement as the primary path to improved economic, social and health status. At the core of the initiative is its continued effort to build leaders in the field of education by

offering a variety of institutes for Central Louisiana educators.

“Aspiring Leaders increases the pool of educators qualified for administrative positions in their districts, which is one of the reasons superintendents recommend teachers for it,” said Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation. “Because the program is centered around high-quality instruction, schools and students benefit.”

The Aspiring Leaders curriculum is based on the Center for Educational Leadership’s theory of action that states, “student learning will not improve until the quality of teaching improves, and the quality of teaching will not improve until leaders understand what constitutes high-quality instruction along with the role they play in improving teacher practice.”

Aspiring Leaders graduates typically apply for its companion program, Leading for Better Instruction, after being promoted to administrative positions. In 2017, the two programs merged to form the five-year Continuum of Learning for

“Aspiring Leaders increases the pool of educators qualified for administrative positions in their districts, which is one of the reasons superintendents recommend teachers for it.

Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation

Leadership Development and moving forward the first two years will be focused on Aspiring Leaders and the last three years will be focused on Leading for Better Instruction. The continuum allows for entry based on participant skill and experience.

Wendy London, Project Director for the Center for Educational Leadership, helped design the curriculum, and she facilitated the Aspiring Leaders Class of 2017.

“The whole idea of the program and the theory of action that we have at the Center for Educational Leadership, and that The Orchard Foundation and The Rapides Foundation embrace, is that student learning is not going to improve unless teaching practice improves. We feel that principals need to not only evaluate teachers but to support them in their growth. That’s a whole different kind of leadership and that’s what we’re teaching in both Aspiring Leaders and Leading for Better Instruction. The whole five-year program is all about what do leaders do in order to create this environment where teachers improve their practice.”

The 22 participants were broken into two different cohorts after meeting as a larger group in an opening and closing session. During the first and second years, the groups met five times per year, conducting learning walks at schools, gaining an understanding of high-quality instruction, deepening their skills in classroom observation, and learning how to use data and evidence to identify trends in teaching practices. In the third year, sessions were held at The Rapides Foundation Building. “It was all classroom-based. We were reinforcing concepts from the past two years, but also introducing concepts they would

ASPIRING LEADERS

be getting in Leading for Better Instruction,” London said.

Not all Aspiring Leaders graduates go directly into Leading for Better Instruction. In fact, some choose to continue teaching and then apply for Leading for Better Instruction when they take on administrative positions. Regardless of the timing, Central Louisiana schools benefit by having teacher leaders in classrooms.

“Schools where teachers continually grow and improve operate in a culture that’s like a learning environment. For a teacher in the Aspiring Leaders program, you are going to be learning a lot about classroom practice. When we learn to observe and analyze instruction, it’s all about how do I gather evidence in the classroom, how do I go in and observe and gather evidence that then I can have a conversation with the teacher and give feedback to the teacher so that they can improve their practice,” London said. “What teachers tell us is that they didn’t go into this program thinking

ASPIRING LEADERS CLASS OF 2017

- DIONE BRADFORD, Vernon
- JEREMY CASSELS, LaSalle
- KEITHA CHAPMAN, Allen
- GAYLYN CONSTANCE, Grant
- SHARMON CONSTANTINO, Rapides
- HAYLEY DEAN, Rapides
- DARETH DELHOSTE, LaSalle
- JENNIFER DOUCET, Allen
- MICHAEL DUBOIS, Grant
- MICHAEL EDWARDS, Grant
- REBECCA FLETCHER, Grant
- CASEY FORET, Avoyelles
- RICHIE FOWLER, LaSalle
- WHITNEY GOLDSTEIN, Catahoula
- JARRETT GRANGER, Allen
- AUDRA HUKINS, Rapides
- LAQUANTA JONES, Rapides
- JESSICA MARKS, LaSalle
- WENDI O’HALLORAN, Rapides
- SHANNA POWELL, LaSalle
- EVELYN RODRIGUEZ, Rapides
- BRANDY SANDERS, Vernon

ASPIRING LEADERS



Project Director Wendy London said Aspiring Leaders is for “anyone who wants to have an impact that’s broader than the classroom.”

this is going to improve me as a teacher, but what they find is that they learned about instruction in a way they had not thought about before.”

London applauded the teachers who took their time to participate in Aspiring Leaders. “Anyone who wants to have an impact that’s broader than the classroom should consider this leadership program,” she said.

Parkway Elementary School Assistant Principal Dione Bradford said her participation in Aspiring Leaders provided her with “a treasure chest of information and skills that have proven useful both while in the classroom and in an administrative seat.”

In the first year, participants studied the Louisiana Compass Teacher Performance Evaluation rubric and the CEL’s 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, and they conducted walk-throughs at schools. “As a future administrator at the time, I began seeing the importance of being knowledgeable of what the teacher and students are saying and doing as it relates to instruction and learning. I recognized the impact each component has on effective teaching and student achievement,” Bradford said.

The next year, Bradford’s cohort began to deepen their understanding of targeted feedback and the power of equity. “This work seamlessly transitioned us into understanding the moves that teachers make to push thinking, engage students, and grow professionally.”

“ I appreciate the structure and the wealth of knowledge each of our instructors shared during each meeting.

Dione Bradford, Parkway Elementary School Assistant Principal

Work in the third and final year moved to an in-depth review of the previous years. “We analyzed case scenarios, linked our conclusions to equity and inquiry, and developed visions that could combat reoccurring pitfalls that many new school leaders face. I appreciate the structure and the wealth of knowledge each of our instructors shared during each meeting. I also enjoyed the use of collaboration to glean from the experiences of my peers in our cohort,” she said.

Bradford is looking forward to Leading for Better Instruction. “It has always been my desire to stay in the light of learning. Based on my experience as an aspiring leader, I trust that Leading for Better Instruction will provide the same high-quality of instruction and expertise,” she said. “I hope to get more experience in application of the practices I learn and to increase my knowledge of growth mindset and improve my skills of supporting teachers in their instructional practices.”

London said CEL staff members continuously customize trainings so that they are relevant for their audience. A training program for educators in another state, for example, may be different from one taught in Central Louisiana.

“We always use our research-based tools, but we use them side by side with what is appropriate to the local context. That just makes it much more rich and applicable. Participants don’t just learn a University of Washington curriculum,” London said. “Aspiring leaders need to understand the research base and the practical tools that are in place right now in Central Louisiana in their own districts. That’s our approach.”





LEADING FOR BETTER INSTRUCTION

Eight Central Louisiana public school principals completed a three-year instructional leadership program that aims to improve classroom instruction and student achievement. Leading for Better Instruction is a training curriculum developed specifically for Central Louisiana by the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership. Taught by CEL staff, the program is funded by The Rapides Foundation and administered by The Orchard Foundation.

The program is based on the Center for Educational Leadership's theory of action that states, "student learning will not improve until the quality of teaching improves, and the quality of teaching will not improve until leaders understand what constitutes high-quality instruction along with the role they play in improving teacher practice."

The eight principals chosen for the 2017 class were selected by their superintendents. Their

work culminated in spring 2017 with "Leadership Fellows" presentations before their peers and district supervisors. The eight principals, who represent five Central Louisiana parishes, are:

- Wendy Adams, Avoyelles Parish
- Stacy Felton, Grant Parish
- Peggy Kessler, Rapides Parish
- Jeffrey Odom, Catahoula Parish
- Rhonda Roberts, Vernon Parish
- Sharice Sullivan, Avoyelles Parish
- Paxton Teddlie, Grant Parish
- Karla Tumminello, Rapides Parish

The Rapides Foundation brought Leading for Better Instruction and its companion program, Aspiring Leaders, to Central Louisiana as part of its Education Initiative. The initiative seeks to increase the level of educational attainment and achievement as the primary path to improved economic, social and health status.

LEADING FOR BETTER INSTRUCTION

“One of the core strategies for our initiative has been to provide professional development and leadership opportunities for teachers and school leaders. Research tells us that strong school leadership and instructional strategies ultimately lead to improved student achievement,” said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation.

Previously, Aspiring Leaders was a separate three-year program that trained educators with aspirations of becoming administrators. Graduates typically applied for Leading for Better Instruction after being promoted to administrative positions. In 2017, the two programs merged to form the five-year Continuum of Learning for Leadership Development and moving forward the first two years will be focused on Aspiring Leaders and the last three years will be focused on Leading for Better Instruction. The continuum allows for entry based on participant skill and experience.

“Once they complete Leading for Better Instruction, principals are fully prepared for higher positions in Central Offices, or they may choose to remain in their schools as effective leaders. Either way, Central Louisiana students benefit by having high-quality instructional leaders in their districts,” said Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation.

The administrators began Leading for Better Instruction in the 2014-15 school year. In addition to opening and closing sessions, the group met five times during each school year. The principals’

“**Once they complete Leading for Better Instruction, principals are fully prepared for higher positions in Central Offices, or they may choose to remain in their schools as effective leaders.**

Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation



“**The most beneficial information I gained from my participation is how to give quality feedback to my teachers to improve instruction.**

Karla Tumminello, Buckeye Elementary School Principal

study focused on developing a learning-focused culture; deepening their ability to observe and analyze instruction; using an inquiry model to analyze the needs of students, teachers and leadership; identifying an area for improvement; implementing an improvement plan and measuring its impact; and designing a system of professional development tailored to the specific needs of teachers. On the third and final year, the principals used what they learned to implement a school-wide improvement plan with the support of a CEL coach. Throughout the process, the group worked with their peers in addition to their coach.

“Being a principal is a lonely job, so that’s why we had them partner up as much as possible,” said Diane Smith, Project Director for the Center for Educational Leadership. “The goal is for them to have a partner that they can bounce ideas off of or call if they get stuck. The hope is that during the three years, that they have built those relationships and become a community of learners.”

LEADING FOR BETTER INSTRUCTION

Smith said the goal is to develop instructional leaders, not managers, to lead schools and districts.

"Principals need to know how to lead for instruction and not just be a manager. When I went through my principal licensure program, most of the courses were focused on managerial issues and not on developing effective instruction. Now the expectation is principals need to be instructional leaders and their goal is to improve instruction to impact student achievement," she said.

Participants said they appreciated the teacher observations, networking opportunities and personal guidance from CEL staff.

"The most beneficial information I gained from my participation is how to give quality feedback to my teachers to improve instruction," said Buckeye Elementary School Principal Karla Tumminello, who has been an educator for 33 years. "It was also very beneficial visiting other schools and collaborating with other principals. I was able to observe different grade level teachers and come back and share some of the instructional practices I observed with my teachers. My participation has helped me give my teachers more meaningful feedback and narrow their area of improvement to make them better teachers."

Tumminello said she believes Leading for Better Instruction helped her become a better instructional leader. "I have also been able to use ideas from other principals that have benefited my school, faculty and students. I would recommend the program to other educators because it has been a very positive experience for me, and new leaders need support from many different sources to become successful Instructional leaders."

Jeffrey Odom, who just completed his sixth year as principal of Block High School, said, "On top of being able to network with other principals, I received great coaching from some very good people. Probably the most helpful thing I learned was how to teach backwards design to my



“ I received great coaching from some very good people.

Jeffrey Odom,
Block High School
Principal

teachers. Having a resource to ask questions and seek advice really set me up for success in my school. This three-year journey has helped Block High School in many ways and has left its mark on me as an administrator. I plan on using the things I have learned and am very thankful for this opportunity."

While it was sometimes difficult for a school principal to take time off for training, Odom said CEL coaches "made sure that the work we did was not busy work. The things we did we could almost automatically apply to our school, and it helped."

Odom said his yearlong project on backwards design and test analysis will ultimately help Block High. "I know that Rome was not built in a day, but because of the support and information I received from this program, Block High is moving in the right direction."

Smith said she was proud of the group's work. "I really enjoyed working with them. They have different leadership styles but they are all very capable principals. I think they all learned something this year."

In addition to funding training from the Center for Educational Leadership, The Rapides Foundation also funds leadership training in Kagan's Cooperative Learning Strategies and Kagan Structures. The Foundation also provides the nine Central Louisiana public school districts with grants they use for coaching and mentoring of their teachers, and leadership development for their administrators.





MY CIVIC LIFE

VOLUNTEER SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA HIGH SCHOOLS

A new program funded by The Rapides Foundation and administered through its Community Development Works program is providing Central Louisiana students volunteer service opportunities so that they will become engaged in their communities and make volunteerism a lifelong habit.

My Civic Life is an evidence-based civic engagement and service learning program for high school students. The Rapides Foundation, through CDW, launched a pilot of My Civic Life in 20 schools in the spring. Beginning with the

2017-18 school year, the program is now in 17 schools in five Central Louisiana school districts.

My Civic Life is a component of the Foundation's Community Development Initiative, an initiative under the Healthy Communities priority area that supports leadership and nonprofit development, and increased civic engagement. CDW offers training and leadership programs that provide nonprofits and individuals with tools and resources to support citizen-led community development efforts. The recent addition of My Civic Life is intended to reach younger people with the ultimate goal of

cultivating future community leaders.

“CDW already had expertise in working with adults. What this new program presents is an opportunity to educate youth about their role in the community so they can set goals for greater involvement during high school and beyond,” said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. “This program also gives nonprofits an opportunity to show young people what their role could be in helping make their communities stronger.”

Under the program, students are selected to join school-based community service clubs, called Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) Clubs, which perform service projects throughout the school year. Monthly meetings are led by CDW staff using the Youth Volunteer Corps club model. YVC is a nationally recognized community service nonprofit, and The Rapides Foundation is one of only two YVC affiliates from Louisiana. A teacher or other staff member at each participating school works with the club to coordinate activities and serves as the YVC School Liaison between the school and CDW.

At meetings, members discuss community needs and plan service projects. As part of the project, CDW identifies and reaches out to nonprofits located near the high school so students will get a better sense of their own community and learn how they can help.

As an incentive, students who perform more than 80 hours of community service can earn a Community Service Diploma Endorsement through the Louisiana Department of Education. This endorsement shows potential employers the student’s work skills and commitment. YVC Club members average about 30 hours of volunteer service each year.

In addition to the school-level YVC Clubs, My Civic Life offers leadership development training for a Youth Advisory Board consisting of youth volunteers from throughout Central Louisiana YVC Clubs. To date, 23 Central Louisiana students serve on the Youth Advisory Board. In the summer, board members attended leadership development training led by national youth development and service learning experts from the National Youth Leadership Council. Members now meet online every other month.

Future plans for the My Civic Life project are to create an online platform that allows young people to search for volunteer opportunities in Central Louisiana. Nonprofits, in turn, will be able to use the website to describe their work and announce upcoming volunteer projects with the goal of connecting young people with nonprofit organizations.

During the YVC pilot, students logged more than 300 service hours volunteering in their communities. Projects included park and neighborhood cleanups, volunteering at children’s museums, cultural festivals and libraries; visiting senior citizens and disabled residents at nursing homes and rehab centers; holding canned food drives; collecting and donating hygiene kits for the homeless; and volunteering at a camp for low-income youth.

Ladarrion Winslow of Clarence, a senior at Lakeview Junior/Senior High School in Natchitoches Parish, joined the YVC Club last school year. He was one of 10 students chosen to participate. “I feel honored because it gives me a chance to help the community and to help others,” he said.

Lakeview YVC Club School Liaison Joan Buswell, the school librarian, said she chose



Lakeview High School senior Ladarrion Winslow enjoys giving back to his community.

members based on several factors, such as academics, discipline, demographics and personality. "Basically, I wanted a well-rounded group representative of all the communities included in our student population," she said. "We have students at various academic levels, outgoing students and others who are shy. I selected students whom I thought would benefit socially from being part of the group."

So far, Lakeview YVC Club members are considering clothes drives, food drives and community cleanups for their service projects during this school year. "I think YVC will teach the importance of volunteerism, leadership and community involvement and that they will remember their experiences when they become adults," Buswell said. "I'm glad that they are offered the opportunity to participate in community service activities because I've heard students say they would like to give back and also be able to show their kind heart and willingness to help others."

In Winn Parish, Dodson High School was one of the 20 schools chosen to pilot the YVC Club. School Liaison Jessica Staggs carefully selected five or six students to lead the club, and she has been pleased with their work.

"I identified kids who were not involved in other organizations, or who were involved but were overshadowed by other people. I looked for students that I felt had more potential to lead, who had the potential to be leaders but were too scared or shy ... kids who would never raise their hand and say 'I want to be a leader' because of their self confidence."

What she found were top-notch students who rose to the challenge and exceeded expectations. They quickly developed leadership skills and are excited about volunteer opportunities.

"They feel like they are family. They get to know each other and they get to do good things together. When you do good things for other people it makes you feel good about yourself and it makes them feel good as a group. They identify themselves for a good purpose. They have a purpose here," she said.

In the spring, the Dodson YVC Club held a food drive, worked an educational booth at the Louisiana Forest Festival in Winnfield, and promoted healthy lifestyles at a Community Color Run where color powder is thrown on runners as they cross through stations along the route.



Dodson High School YVC School Liaison Jessica Staggs (pictured with Club President Hannah Vines) said YVC members have exceeded expectations.

This year, club members are planning a canned food drive and are looking for needs in the community. "We want to publicize in our community that we are available for things that are purposeful," Staggs said.

"My primary focus in being a teacher and loving these kids is helping them learn that they can change their reality, that they are worth more than they think they are worth and that they can become leaders whenever they didn't think they were leaders," she said. "They learned they can do all those things through the YVC."

One of the program's goals is to promote growth and leadership skills among young people. Staggs has seen it firsthand with her YVC members. "It's amazing. They want to be involved everywhere now. They learned that they can be involved and they can excel."

The Dodson YVC club's president is Hannah Vines, an 11th-grader who was one of the original students selected for the pilot last school year. Hannah said she was honored to be chosen and has grown as a leader because of her involvement in the YVC. Because of her involvement and dedication to YVC, Hannah was selected to be a member of the Youth Advisory Board.

"I'm really loving being in this club because I get to help others and I get to volunteer at different places, which is a really cool experience for me, and I get to meet new friends. It's been a great experience for me and that's what I like. I like to be able to help others and I like to do things for a lot of people," she said. "The other thing that I enjoy about this club is I used to be afraid of public speaking. But now that I'm in YVC I can do that, I've gotten used to it and I'm happier. YVC just changed me as a person."





Youth Advocacy Council members planned and implemented the summit.

YOUTH SUMMIT ON HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

SEVENTH ANNUAL EVENT DRAWS 600 PARTICIPANTS

The Rapides Foundation's seventh annual Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors drew 600 students and teachers from seven Central Louisiana school districts in October at the Alexandria Riverfront Center. The summit is a one-day event for students to learn how to become advocates for healthy choices and policy change in their schools and communities.

"Adopting healthy behaviors is generational work," said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. "We know we have to give young people the information and tools they need to make healthier decisions if we hope to improve the health status of our communities. The youth summit is a great avenue to provide that learning opportunity."



Community advocate Jason Thompson presented the opening session.


YOUTH SUMMIT ON HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

The summit is part of The Rapides Foundation's Healthy Behaviors Initiative, and is attended each year by students and teachers participating in the Foundation's Healthy Behaviors School District Partnership Grant. The goal of the grant is to provide students, staff and teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to make better and informed behavior decisions leading to healthier lives. Participating school districts in the 2017-18 grant are: Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, Natchitoches, Rapides and Vernon.

The theme of the 2017 Youth Summit was *#MoveMore #EatWell #LiveClean*, and the agenda for the day included youth advocacy presentations, energizer breaks, and breakout sessions to educate summit participants on the issues of tobacco prevention, substance and alcohol abuse prevention, and healthy eating and active living. Presenters included nationally recognized advocates in those focus areas. The opening session, "It's Time to Be VOCAL (Viral Operations to Change Attitudes and Lifestyles)," was presented by Jason Thompson, co-founder



and owner of marketing firm Fahrenheit Creative Group. Thompson is a community advocate who is passionate about equity in health and other quality of life standards.

The summit was planned by a group of youth advocates who serve on the Foundation's Youth Advocacy Council. In addition to planning and leading the summit, Youth Advocacy Council members learned leadership, team-building, research and public speaking skills, while also creating an advocacy project titled "My Healthy High!" The advocacy project focuses on Substance and Alcohol Abuse Prevention and includes a public service announcement, toolkit and resource directory. All participants at the youth summit received the advocacy project components to implement in their own schools and communities throughout the school year. 



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The Rapides Foundation continues a legacy of community healthcare initiated in 1903.

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