



# **Students leave summit at MJCFH inspired to make difference in schools, communities**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
March 1 2016 9:25 AM



**EDWARDSVILLE** - The **Madison County High School** and middle school students who participated in the recent Student Summit at the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities (MJCHF) left with excitement and wanting to make a difference in their school and their communities.

Area high school and middle school students across Madison County participated in the discussions around the MJCHF four pillars – **Respect, Dignity, Understanding and Forgiveness**. The youth had conversations about how to make the country better with some of the future leaders. The **MJCFH** and **Lewis & Clark Community College** will partner with the **Regional Superintendent** and **Madison County** to encourage area youth to think outside their comfort zones and consider how we must treat each other if we are to exist as a thriving society.

“We must learn to listen, respect, understand and even at times forgive,” **MJCHF Executive Director Dr. Ed Hightower** said before the meeting.

Dr. Hightower couldn’t have been more pleased with how the event turned out.

“It was an extraordinary event for young people having close to 100 high school students one day and over 110 middle school students on the second day all talking about respect and dignity in their schools,” Dr. Hightower said. “They also all wanted to make a difference and share their concern about the political discourse and polarization we are seeing out there from our leaders. The overriding theme from the high school students was they don’t want to see their high school or community to focus on the negative political trail we are seeing from our leaders. It was really refreshing to see the students in their discussions and we know they are excited about going back and building their projects.”

Retired teachers such as James Kerr, Chris Head, Annice Brave and LaDonna Whitner and current administrators **Dr. Linda Chapman**, **Dr. Sean Hill** and **Andrew Reinking** volunteered as facilitators and supporting school teams as they begin their research project. **Regional Superintendent Dr. Robert Daiber** was also a big supporter of the Student Summit.

Daiber said he thought the summit overall was “excellent.”

“We had great participation both with high school and middle school groups,” he said. “We had teams and delegations from schools and they left with real targeted messages to go back to schools and develop a proposal to be submitted to a committee. It helped engage students in types of things we want them to be engaged in. We want to see greater civility in our culture and school climate. The kids left there with a little more dignified message than they did prior to the summit. It went better than I expected; I didn’t know how engaged they would be. We had a really good group of professional facilitators to move it along. The kids were excited on the way back to work in their school and community on the project.”

Alton High School Principal Russ Tepen said the program was “outstanding.”

“Dr. Hightower did a fantastic job grouping everything together,” Tepen said. “There were outstanding speakers throughout the day. It opened up and you could just feel the sense of community in the room. We did our breakouts and the kids shared ideas for the project. One thing is it helped to identify there is not only needs in the school community, in the community in general and how we can make that happen. We had about six or seven kids who attended and knocked around some ideas.”

Students will have the opportunity to earn up to \$5,000 for their school to fund their two-year research project. Students must submit a project proposal, statement of issue describing a problem, and solutions regarding how their school or community will benefit from their findings. If the project proposal is approved, students will be awarded a fellowship grant for the implementation of their school research project.







