

# Locker letters: Students at Liberty Middle School spreading sense of community

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - Letters left on lockers encourage students at **Liberty Middle School** to maintain a positive outlook for the rest of their day.

As many as 1,000 letters with positive messages or encouraging quotes were taped to lockers throughout the school by students actively engaged in a project to improve school culture. That program began with a "**Coversations Toward a Brighter Future**" discussion last spring at the **Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities** in Edwardsville. Students from across the River Bend area were tasked with implementing programs at their school to better the school's environment utilizing the four pillars of respect, dignity, understanding and forgiveness. Students then submitted their proposals and were given grants based on their ideas. The students at Liberty Middle School in

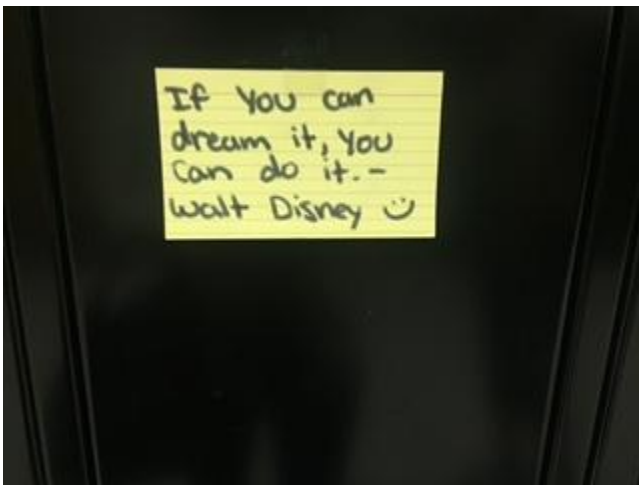
Edwardsville decided to use that funding to implement the "**Panther Welcome**," which launched on Aug. 11, 2016. The letters left on lockers was the most recent incarnation of that campaign.

"The 'Conversations Toward a Brighter Future' program is a grant funded by the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities," **Liberty Middle School Principal Beth Crumbacher** said in an email. "**Dr. Ed Hightower** and **Dr. Bob Daiber** are facilitators for the project. The grants were offered to Madison County middle and high schools.

"A group of students did an activity over the weekend that involved writing almost 1,000 handwritten notes of encouragement and motivation. The group came to school on Sunday and posted a note on each locker, so that when the school body arrived on Monday morning, they saw notes posted on their locker."

Students involved in the program are also part of **Guidance and Operation leadership training** provided over the summer for nearly 100 students from both Liberty and **Lincoln** middle Schools. During the first meeting of these students in the 2016-17 school year, they decided to create a Kindness Campaign.

"Students identified by their peers will receive a handwritten note giving them encouragement, acknowledging effort and/or extending an opportunity for friendship," Crumbacher said in her progress report to the Conversations Toward a Brighter Future program.



New students to Liberty Middle School are invited to a **New Student Welcome** during the year's first quarter activity periods. A second quarter event will allow new students to invite a friend to attend the gathering. Crumbacher said the goal of her students is to extend friendship opportunities so the new students feel like "full members of the school community."

Liberty Middle School students utilized the grant money received from the program to create these programs. The Panther Welcome campaign cost \$200 for food and supplies, which was based on the amount of incoming sixth grade students. The New Student Welcome incurs a cost of \$100-\$200 a quarter for food and supplies, which is based on the amount of new students enrolled in August. **The Kindness Campaign** cost \$50 for markers and papers.

Videos were also made by students to promote their campaigns. Creating those videos was the most expensive activity using the grant money. Liberty videos cost \$325 for a Mini iPad 2, cover and iTunes card, which was used to download editing software.

