

'CONVERSATION TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE': Alton High School's Bridge Project

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The following article is presented as part of the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities' "Conversations Toward A Brighter Future" discussion series.

The articles are prepared by the participants of the discussion in their own words.



ALTON - The Alton High School Bridge Project, in its second year, is off to an outstanding start with several students, faculty, and parents involved.

The goal of the Alton High School Bridge project is to improve “respect” at all levels including students, teachers, administration, and parents. It is paramount to promoting mutual understanding among people of different cultures, races, and individuals with special needs.

Our activities will enhance positive synergy and interaction both in and outside the classroom. Students, faculty, and parents will engage in school programs where positive achievements are highlighted. Conflict resolution will become a priority in reducing verbal disagreement, violence, and bad feelings among students, teachers, and administration.

“Respect, Responsibility, Safety, & Kindness (RRSK) Student Lunches”

RRSK is the motto of Alton High School. Through The Bridge Program, we have incorporated a monthly student lunch where students of all grade levels discuss the school’s climate and how to improve it. This takes place in the library. In order to participate, students are nominated by staff members. Students discuss what is going well at Alton High School, and also what needs to be improved.

Recently, students discussed the issue of headphones in the hallways and classrooms. They suggested that students be allowed to have their headphones while in the hallways, but not in the classrooms. Staff members brought the idea to leadership meetings and all agreed to a trial basis. We have had good results with this change, and to date, we have seen a decrease in referrals for electronic devices, which includes referrals for issues with headphones.



“POSITIVE REFERRALS”

With “The Bridge Program” we have implemented a way to recognize good behavior by rewarding students with a positive referral. Students who are seen “doing what’s right”

can be nominated for a positive referral by any staff member; a student who was seen by a security guard helping another student with their lockers could receive a positive referral.

Students who are recognized for receiving a positive referral are announced over the intercom every Thursday during fifth hour. They report to the main office to receive a certificate, a picture with the other recipients (and principal), and become eligible for the end of the year Sports Day. To date, we have issued over 600 positive referrals for students

As this activity progressed, students suggested the idea of recognizing the teachers in a similar way. Subsequently, students now have the opportunity to nominate staff members for positive referrals. Students can go to the RRSK website and submit a positive referral for any staff member. Staff members are recognized during 2nd hour each Tuesday. To date, we have recognized approximately 40 staff members.

“All School Sports Day”

Incorporated with our Bridge Program, we also have started an “All School Sports Day” co-sponsored with Special Olympics and PBIS. PBIS, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, is a statewide program that supports students and teachers and provides resources and interventions for student behavior.

Beginning last school year towards the end of the year, students by grade level rotated outside to participate in different activities, enjoy food, drinks, music, and were also able to socialize with peers. Any student who is seen doing a good deed, or simply doing their role as a student will receive a positive referral which will allow them to be eligible for Alton High’s sports day. Students can earn a positive referral by any staff member observing them when seen doing the right thing around campus.

“In School Suspension/Detention Supervisors Training”

In January, the Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice Project will be training our In-School Suspension and Detention Supervisors, Restorative Practice Coaches, and approximately 10 other faculty members in Restorative Practice techniques.

The idea behind this is to provide students some restorative opportunities instead of punitive discipline. While students are serving their time in suspension or detention, supervisors will be able to teach the students how to foster respectful relationships with their peers and staff members.

This will help decrease the amount of conflicts that we see in our school. Students will have the opportunity to participate in restorative practice through Peer Jury. A Peer Jury was started this year to get students more involved with discipline policies and restorative practices.



Evaluation of The Bridge Project

In order to determine the success of The Bridge Project, we will be analyzing many data points.

We will determine the success of the RRSK lunches by analyzing discipline data. For example, we have already seen a decrease in the amount of electronics referrals due to the change in policy that was made. We hope to see this continue with other suggestions this group has made.

We will determine the success of positive referrals by analyzing the amount of positive referrals given to teachers and to staff. We will also be surveying the staff and students about their thoughts on positive referrals and how we can improve the process.

We will determine the success of the all school sports day by the amount of participation. The goal is to have 100 percent student participation, and the requirement to participate is to receive a positive referral.

We will determine the success of the Restorative Practice training by analyzing the discipline data specific to respect. We will compare the amount of referrals from last year to this year and hope to see a significant decrease.