

Students report on their Conversation Towards a Brighter Future projects

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities held the second Conversation Towards a Brighter Future summit Tuesday morning at the Mannie Jackson Center in Edwardsville.

Executive Director of the Center for the Humanities, Dr. Ed Hightower said Conversations Towards a Brighter Future is occurring as a solution to the negative discourse that is taking place across the county, empower students as they address concerns and work towards creating a better environment for themselves and fellow students.

“The schools that are participating in this two-year project focus around respect, dignity, understanding and forgiveness,” Hightower said. “Student leaders have identified problems that are relevant in the schools and in their communities and are seeking ways to address those concerns through conversation and through community building.”

Several Madison County schools were provided a \$5,000 scholarship for the project and showcased just how much they accomplished over the year through the Conversation Towards a Brighter Future project during Tuesday’s summit.

Students from Civic Memorial High School said through their FreshMentors program they've seeing attendance rates increase, with previous rates below 90 percent the freshman class alone has reach a 94.6 percent attendance rate.

Edwardsville High School students said their efforts to help new students feel less anxious or lonely has resulted in a lot more happier and comfortable students, with 71 percent of Tigers reporting a positive change in feelings of acceptance and mutual respect at EHS.

At Alton High School, the students creating a positive school climate through acts of recognition such as positive referrals and are working to help support students emotionally. All administrators at the school have been working to complete Trauma Informed Care training from Great Circle too better help students that are facing emotional stress and trauma.

"Hearing these young people who started this project with a simple vision, and to see now how they have taken that vision and put it into action was very gratifying and exhilarating," Hightower said. "These young people, they have the answers. All we adults need to do is get out of the way, empower these young people, support them and let them do what they know best how to do and that is conduct civil conversation, be respectful to each other. Then we adults attempt to mimic and take on their attitudes that they have demonstrated before us."

With Edwardsville High School, Liberty and Lincoln Middle School, Alton Middle School, Alton High School, Collinsville Middle School, Collinsville High School, Granite City High School, Triad High School, East Alton Middle School, East Alton - Wood River High School, Civic Memorial High School, Troy Center for Education Opportunities and Roxana High School all participating in the program Dr. Robert Daiber, Regional Superintendent of Madison County, praised each school and their student leaders for the initiative shown to improve their environment both in the classrooms and the community.

"A year ago when we kicked this off we all had a vision as to what it was going to be but it became what it is because of your work," Daiber said. "In time you're work is making a difference. It's making the difference in fellow student's lives and it's making the difference in your school culture and that's what our main mission of conversations to a brighter future is all about. It's about changing that school culture. It's about making it inclusive for all students to feel comfortable there, to feel included and to participate, some of you have made tremendous accomplishments, I am just over pleased by what I reviewed from the final projects last year."



