

Hamilton County Leadership Academy

Youth Leadership Project Report

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The Youth Leadership Project Group of the 2004-2005 Hamilton County Leadership Academy class offered a leadership symposium to current Hamilton County eighth graders who have the potential to be influential leaders in their respective high schools. The event was held on Saturday, March 5, 2005, at Riverview Hospital's Rehabilitation Center in Noblesville. Westfield High School teacher Roger Wachtel facilitated the three-hour leadership development event.

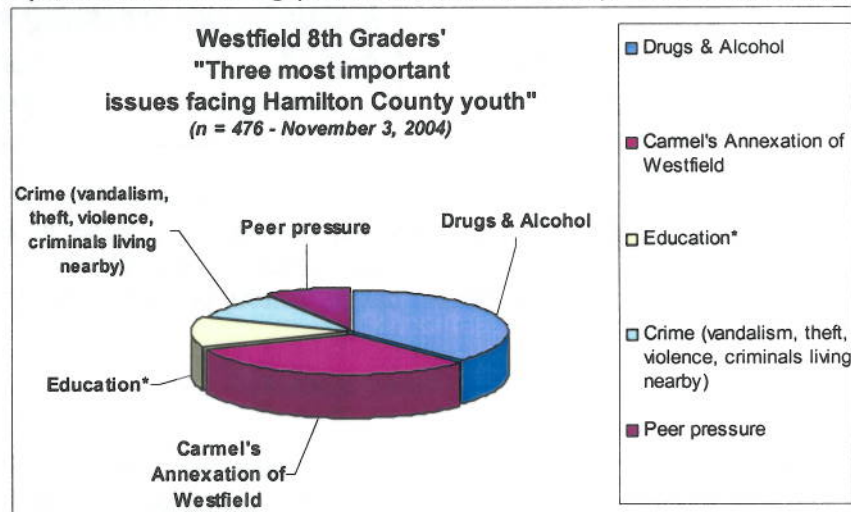
Middle and junior high school principals selected students from their local schools to participate in the event. Thirty students from around Hamilton County met for a three hour leadership learning opportunity. Schools represented included Clay Middle School, Creekside Middle School, Hamilton Southeastern Junior High, Noblesville Middle School, Sheridan Middle School, and Westfield Middle School. The purpose of the symposium was to identify the most pressing problems facing Hamilton County youth and find ways that these future leaders in our county's high schools could influence changes toward positive solutions.

During the Symposium, students identified problems, assessed resources key to solutions, and clarified qualities helpful in being leaders in their schools. They also interacted with Hamilton County leaders representing careers in banking, medicine, insurance, entrepreneurship, ministry, engineering, and education.

The identified mission of the HCLA Project Group is to:

- Give young people a voice in Hamilton County
- Put them in a position of leadership
- Empower them to improve themselves and their community.
- Develop future leaders.
- Grow a sense of responsibility to payback the community in which they live
- Partner with youth in addressing issues or concern

With this in mind, The HCLA Project Group conducted in November of 2004 a preliminary survey of 476 8th graders to determine the most important issues facing youth in Hamilton County. The results of this survey appear below:



The group's mission, along with the survey information, laid the foundation for the structure of the Symposium. Roger Wachtel did an excellent job of creating an atmosphere that allowed the students to be active and honest participants.

During the Symposium, the most pressing issues identified by the participants differed from the initial survey. The eight grade participants worked in 5 groups to identify and list in order of importance the most pressing issues. Their responses were:

Matrix of Responses to "Most Pressing Issues" Activity

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School (grades) • Relationships (boy/girl) • Relationships (friends) • Relationships (family) • Peer pressure (smoking, drinking, & drugs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships (friends) • Drugs/alcohol • Relationships (family) • School (worry about future) • Social status (appearance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self image • School (grades) • Relationships (family & friends) • Drugs/alcohol • Worry about the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships (friends) • Alcohol • Relationships (family) • Personal safety • Bullying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships (family & friends) • School (grades) • Self Image • Drugs/alcohol • Relationships (boy/girl)

Each group was allowed to present what they felt was the most pressing issues. A general discussion developed of specific examples such as grades, relationships, peer pressure, bullying, and self image. Once the issue of bullying was raised, many of the students responded passionately about how big of a problem both verbal and non verbal bullying has become in their local schools.

Each participant was asked to describe characteristics and traits that make a great leader. The list included: confidence, comfort with one's self, likeability, respect for one another, self assured image, humility, service orientation, persistence, courage of conviction, trustworthiness, goal orientation, good listening skills, and willingness to admit one's faults.

Based on what the students identified as the most pressing issues and the most important characteristics of a great leader, students shared how these characteristics and traits could best be used to make a difference.

In closing, the moderator charged each student to discover some of the things he/she can do in his/her school and community where they can use their gifts to positively influence others.

"...the rewards when you are doing something right do not always come right away but the rewards when you do something bad, come immediately. People say, 'Oh yeah- they're cool because they are doing something bad.'"

- From one of the 8th graders in attendance

The challenge to these students was for them to get involved in some area of school life where they can make a difference. Each was charged to take the leadership qualities they have and use these attributes to help guide other people toward improving their school and community. One student responded that *"to do anything to help other people we have to change our attitudes about certain peopleand be more open to the idea of helping them out."*

Final Thoughts

The Symposium was an excellent opportunity for young people to express their opinions in a free and open format. Prior to this forum, the majority of the members of our team were confident that we knew the "most pressing issues" facing 8th graders in Hamilton County. However, the discussion and feedback from the participants reinforced the need for more adults in Hamilton County to listen to our youth, motivate more students to get involved in leadership and empower them to improve themselves and their community. Based on this experience, our recommendation is to have more opportunities like this to give young people a stronger voice in the issues that are affecting them and to motivate people to get more involved in Hamilton County.

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