HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPLORE RIGOROUS NEW PATH TO SUCCESS AT LEAD INNOVATION STUDIO

Educators from around the region are coming to the Park Hill School District to learn about one of our most forward-thinking ideas yet — the LEAD Innovation Studio for high school students.

The visitors will see our new education model making a difference for students who want a different way to learn. LEAD students engage in project-based, personalized learning that focuses on problem-solving skills and professional experiences.

They have different ability levels and come from all backgrounds, just like students in all of our classrooms. LEAD students are Park Hill High School Trojans or Park Hill South High School Panthers, and they can participate in extracurricular activities at their home high schools.

Teachers actively support LEAD’s self-directed students as they use projects and advanced tools to master the information they need for college, career and life readiness.

“They're getting experience and exposure that helps them find what they're passionate about, helps them find purpose,” said Dr. Ryan Stanley, LEAD principal.

Each student is paired with a teacher for mentoring, and they meet one-on-one and in a small group every week to discuss students’ progress toward achieving goals. Sophomore Marcell King said the mentoring “builds a bond that can’t be broken . . . It’s kind of easy getting through high school with a teacher who knows what you’re going through.”

Shane Smeed, father of sophomore Samantha Smeed, said, “I have no doubt that she is a much stronger student and more college-ready having gone to LEAD.”
Park Hill is fortunate that our incredible students, staff, families and community members make us one of the best options for education in the area — but even Park Hill can be better.

Going from good to great requires a plan. We just launched our 2018-2023 strategic plan to set our direction for the next five years. Staff members and community members developed this plan, which has two goals:

1. Each student will graduate ready for college, career and life.
2. Ensure success for all students, regardless of background.

We support these goals using our Keys to Excellence: finances, academics, climate and employee. Through the planning process, we affirmed our core values, which are visionary leadership, integrity, student focus, high expectations, continuous improvement and equity. We also made small adjustments to our mission statement, which is now “Through the expertise of an engaged staff, the Park Hill School District provides a relevant education in a safe, caring environment to prepare each student for success in life.”

Community support for our schools allows us to carry out this mission. With your backing, we’re building on our achievements from our previous strategic plan and identifying opportunities for us to achieve our vision of “Building Successful Futures • Each Student • Every Day.”

I am honored to work with our staff as we move forward with our new plan, push ourselves for improvement and deliver the results you expect from our top-rated school district.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jeanette Cowherd
Park Hill Superintendent

NEWS WORTH KNOWING

TEACHER HIRING UPDATE
Because of our steady, consistent enrollment growth, we needed to hire 85 teachers this school year, including 17 high school teachers, 13 middle school teachers, 34 elementary school teachers and 21 special education teachers. We recruited the best candidates: they average 6.58 years of experience, and 47 of them hold advanced degrees.

REDISTRICTING UPDATE
In preparation for the opening of Hopewell Elementary and Walden Middle School for the 2019-2020 school year, and in order to balance our very different high school enrollments, we will be redistricting all our attendance boundaries, from elementary through high school. Redistricting will help us continue to be one of the best districts around by protecting our low class sizes and making sure we can balance our resources. Visit our district website, www.parkhill.k12.mo.us, for more information on the process, including meeting updates and feedback opportunities.

SCHOOL START TIMES
As we have grown, it has become more and more difficult for our school-bus service to keep and hire enough bus drivers. This has led to problems in the level of service they are able to provide to Park Hill and our families. To help solve this problem, we will follow in the steps of other large school districts in our region and across the state by adjusting our start times. This might mean that some of our schools start earlier and some schools start later. As a result, we would need fewer bus drivers, allowing our bus service to provide better service to our families while safely transporting our students. This would also significantly reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars required to run the buses. Using enrollment data and parent feedback, we will determine the new start times and announce them in the spring.
Making a difference for a student is a fitting reason to keep a crowd waiting.

Hawthorn Elementary staff had to wait to surprise Mrs. Bianca Miller with the news that she was the Missouri Elementary School Counselor of the Year. She was out riding on a school bus with a student who needed her support.

“I call her the quiet force,” said Dr. Stephanie Amaya, who supervises Park Hill school counselors and school social workers. “Bianca is very steady, very quiet, but she is such a fierce advocate for our children.”

Even before becoming a counselor, working with Park Hill students with special needs shaped Mrs. Miller’s perspective.

“I enjoyed seeing teachers be able to make time to meet a kid where they were, accept their differences and find a way to help them within those differences,” she said.

Her impact on students is clear from the countless children who love and rely on her. But you can also see it in the data. After a survey suggested students didn’t understand the definition of bullying, Mrs. Miller launched a bullying awareness campaign and shared lessons on calming down, acknowledging feelings, understanding what others feel, and using positive self-talk. The students took it all to heart — the rates of reported exclusion, verbal bullying and students who felt bullied all dropped.

“As the years go on, they realize that for the most part, they can stand up for themselves and don’t have to accept mean behaviors as an expectation,” Mrs. Miller said. “There’s a big sense of pride in that they have the power to shape our culture, good or bad.”

Our new strategic plan’s focus on social-emotional learning makes it easier to talk with parents about coping, outside counseling and mental illness. “It says that this is a safe place to be whoever you are and to get whatever you need,” she said.

Parents notice her efforts. A student’s mom nominated Mrs. Miller for the Greater Kansas City School Counselors Elementary Counselor of the Year award, which she won.

In the nomination letter, the mom shared that Mrs. Miller changed her son’s life by supporting him when he needed it and making him feel safe. This parent wrote, “Her love for my son showed in everything she did for us. She wanted only the best for him and put forth her considerable skills and talents to make that happen. It worked.”

Reflecting on her time in Park Hill, Mrs. Miller said, “It’s an amazing feeling because I get to help kids. I can’t really think of anything better than that.”

Visit our website at www.parkhill.k12.mo.us for more information on this story and other success stories.
In an effort to keep the community informed, the “Park Hill Connection” goes to every home in the Park Hill School District, even those without students in our schools. Thank you for your support of your community’s schools!

GET CONNECTED:
Our website has lots of ways for you to engage with Park Hill Schools. Find them all at www.parkhill.k12.mo.us.

Social Media
Find us on Facebook and YouTube, and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @ParkHillSchools.

First Hand E-mail News
Get district news and highlights from Board meetings.

First Hand Mobile
Get text message alerts about weather and emergencies.

Park Hill TV
See our videos on Spectrum Cable channel 18 and Google Fiber TV channel 140.

Online Comment Portal
Share your comments, suggestions for improvement and even your compliments.

RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER

Fourth-grade students at Renner Elementary like Kameron Long (front) and Jojo O’Neal (back) set up math notebooks for their notes using the AVID strategy of including an “essential question.” Renner, English Landing and Prairie Point are piloting the AVID program at the elementary level this year. AVID is a student-centered, research-based approach to prepare students for success at higher grade levels and then for college, career and life. Through high-quality instruction, students develop learning attitudes and skills such as organizing and note taking.