



Engaging and Supporting Middle School Students through Community Partnerships

Carmel Community School, Harrison School District 2

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In 2022, Carmel Middle School in Harrison School District 2 was renamed to Carmel Community School. A community school establishes strong community partnerships to assist the school in addressing the needs of the whole child. The trusting relationships with community partners allows students at Carmel to benefit from the community's expertise, resources, and support. Two such examples are the Pearls of Wisdom and Young Men of Alpha programs.



Pearls of Wisdom served approximately thirty-five girls each year. Students applied and were selected by the school administration team at the beginning of the school year. This program was designed and sponsored by the members of the local Colorado Springs (CO) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. The goal of Pearls of Wisdom is to influence young girls' character development by empowering them to pursue educational excellence, career aspirations, leadership skills, a positive family and social life, and to understand healthy lifestyles.

Students went on field trips and listened to speakers, both of which exposed them to: career, cultural, and educational opportunities in the community; art appreciation; the importance of their physical and mental health and the environment; and educating themselves on the importance of self-confidence, health and wellness, good dental practices, hygiene and grooming. Students also had opportunities to attend summer STEM camps. The program was evaluated based on pre-and-post surveys, oral testimonies, attendance at the Pearls of Wisdom meetings, and improved self-esteem and personal growth as evidenced by changes in attitudes.

The Young Men of Alpha is a program for boys in grades 6-8 which served 16 students. Students were required to complete an application and be approved by the school administration. The program was developed and sponsored by The Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated and the local Colorado Springs Iota Omicron Lambda Chapter. The "Go-to-High School, Go to College" program is designed for young men who want guidance, support, and skills to achieve success; are interested in developing leadership skills; are or will be actively pursuing college/ and or career options; and want or need additional encouragement in pursuit of higher learning. In addition to high school and college preparedness, topics included life skills, financial literacy, and personal growth. This program has not yet been formally evaluated, though growth in participation from Year One (four students) to Year Two (sixteen students) is promising.

In order to have the greatest impact on the success of the students and families, schools should conduct a needs assessment. Once the needs of students, families, community, and staff are determined, school leaders should make outreach to viable and vetted community organizations who can provide the necessary services.