



For Immediate Release

Mukwonago Area School District

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MUKWONAGO HIGH SCHOOL RECOGNIZED FOR SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTING SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS GRANT

School sees Reduced Suspensions, Increased Learning, and Improved Feedback

Mukwonago, WI, July 7, 2015 – Mukwonago High School’s programs for improving student behavior and creating a positive learning environment have been honored by the WI Department of Public Instruction as exemplary models of success in Wisconsin.

A Positive Learning Environment

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s *Safe and Supportive Schools* initiative, the WI DPI began issuing grant funding, training, and technical support in 2010 to 52 Wisconsin public high schools as part of a four-year program to help schools foster better student learning. Mukwonago High School demonstrated significant measurable success in the grant’s target goals to increase capacity for making data-driven decisions, improve school safety and engagement, and create a positive school climate.

Setting Students Up for Success

To increase capacity for making data-driven decisions regarding student behavior and learning, MHS administrators and members of the MHS PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) team examined five years of disciplinary referral data housed in the school’s school-wide information system (SWIS). The goal was to identify areas where encouraging positive student behavior would have the most impact on student learning. Four areas emerged which now serve as the pillars of the school’s

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“Mukwonago Way” philosophy for positive school climate change: **“Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be On Time, Be Safe.”**

Grant efforts began with school staff shifting how they addressed student respect issues such as bullying, profanity, and inappropriate physical contact. Previously, referrals for these types of infractions often resulted in suspending students from school. Struggling MHS students now participate in “check-in, check-out” programs where they meet daily with administrators or counselors who know the students’ histories and can positively intervene if problems arise. “The goal of the S³ grant was to systematically shift behavioral consequences from exclusionary measures like suspension to more academic and engaging alternatives,” said Lou Pawela, MHS Associate Principal. “We’re not ignoring negative behavior; we’ve found a more effective way to prevent it.” The increased level of engagement has yielded a 52% reduction in disciplinary referrals 52% over three years.

Encouraging **responsibility** via in-school academic support programs has also helped students who struggle with preparing for class or being accountable for misbehavior. Students who previously received detentions or out-of-school suspensions now spend time in the MHS Academic Success program where they meet in small groups with a certified teacher for instructional assistance. Staff also continuously recognize positive behaviors in all areas of the school, including the parking lot, cafeteria, restrooms, and hallways. Associate Principal Ron Schlicht noted, “We are trying to make more meaningful connections with students and develop a common language about appropriate behavior – a common set of expectations. Since behavior and academic success are strongly linked, teaching kids in advance what positive behaviors you expect makes it clearer for them and they can rise to the occasion. Recognizing students when they do the right thing encourages others to act the same way when faced with a similar situation.” During 2010-11, 106 students were suspended and missed a combined 347 days of learning. By 2013-14, just 28 students – a 73 percent drop – had been suspended for a total of 55 days – an 84 percent drop.

Final grant efforts focused on improving **punctuality** and **safety**. Decisions to install a new, secure front entrance system and automatic locking doors around the building not only increased the school’s ability to screen visitors but also motivated students to enter the building in the morning before the perimeter

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doors locked. Students also saw increased incentives for good attendance, and staff stress punctuality in school and the workplace. Since 2010, administration has seen truancy levels reduce by 76%.

As a final critical part of increased safety initiatives, students considering or experiencing violent harm to themselves or others saw increased means of finding **safety** in the forms of coaching, guest speakers, print materials, assemblies, web links, videos, and student clubs like S.A.V.E., Link Crew, and Best Buddies. MHS Police Liaison Officer Jason Steinbrenner noted, "This grant has allowed us to continue our efforts in improving the overall safety in the high school."

Proof It's Working

In addition to the reductions in disciplinary referrals, MHS has seen an 84% improvement in its school safety score as measured by the Index for Student Behavior and School Environment. In annual Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, the number of students who affirm they have a positive connection to school and/or to at least one trusted school staff member has seen a steady increase.

Not only has the S³ grant impacted the climate of Mukwonago High School, but district stakeholders have also seen the programs for creating safe and supportive schools grow within the district's other seven schools. Each school has created student expectations matrices, placed posters of appropriate behavior around their buildings, and encouraged positive behavior. Park View Middle School was also recently honored as a PBIS School of Distinction. Additionally, a number of area businesses have partnered with the school district to display posters reinforcing positive behaviors for students when out in the community.

Summing up the why he felt Mukwonago High School earned statewide recognition for its implementation of the national *Safe and Supportive Schools* grant goals, MHS Principal Jim Darin stressed the importance of having the whole school involved in program development, implementation, and feedback. "It's definitely a school-wide effort," he said. "We often use the motto of '*Better Together*.' Everybody is working towards one goal."

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