

Northridge Academy High School

It is often said that the best gifts come in small packages. The sentiment expressed in that old adage is one of the best ways to describe Northridge Academy High School. Our school may be small, but what we exemplify in terms of our habits of collaboration, interaction, and instruction--as an extended family unit--are truly gifts.

The work of making our school, as this family unit, even stronger began in 2017 when our school elected to create a Social Emotional Learning (or S.E.L.) Team based on the school district's recommendation to all schools. The goal of each school's S.E.L. team is to identify social and emotional areas within a school community that require the most focus and attention. Through a number of district-wide, school-wide, and classroom-based surveys--as well as other data gathering activities--the S.E.L. team at Northridge Academy High School was able to pin-point a couple of key areas on which to focus our restorative efforts: self-efficacy and social awareness.

Self-efficacy "refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Social awareness gives one the ability to understand and respond to the needs of others. In other words, our students were in need of support to help them realize their innate potential to succeed and to also be empathetic and understanding of others. We created a number of opportunities designed to strengthen our students' resolve and to help them know, beyond any doubt, that they are capable of achieving greatness in whatever they set their minds on. Our school developed lessons based on Dr. Carol Dweck's teachings on Growth Mindset. We established a "Heart Club" that travels to each homeroom on a monthly, rotating basis to conduct "Restorative circles" within which topics such as bullying, prejudice, and peer pressure can be explored and alleviated. Our school also developed classroom lessons and strategies to allow all students, regardless of any prior difficulties in achievement, to experience some level of academic success. Furthermore, administrators reward large percentages of students for demonstrating success not only in their academics but also on work habit indicators such as improving and maintaining good attendance.

Undoubtedly, the most pivotal point in our efforts to improve the self-efficacy and social awareness of our students came when we joined hands with the Quaglia Institute in 2018. The institute's call to action on developing "Student Voice" married perfectly with our efforts to strengthen these areas of need at NAHS. We began paving the groundwork for these goals by establishing permanent traditions at our school such as grade-level "Breakfast Clubs" in which the class members of each grade congregate for a morning filled with food, fun and friendship all served up by their smiling teachers. Additionally, our school asked each homeroom class to select two student ambassadors to attend a "World Cafe" event in which we sat within teams and jovially addressed and tackled the daily issues that students feel are important. This particular event afforded our school an opportunity to more precisely pinpoint areas of concern for students and we shed even more light on these by inviting those same student ambassadors to speak at a NAHS faculty professional development. The students freely spoke and their voices will continue to echo and inform teacher planning. As a new tradition, their thoughts and feelings will continue to inspire institutional efforts toward building a better, stronger and more reflective community.

Student Voice has become the new "north" on our school's compass. Northridge Academy High School--through our partnership with Quaglia Institute--is on a chartered course toward stronger student involvement and a more complete understanding of their concerns on the part of our faculty. Through this work, we continue to see what truly matters and this goes beyond letter grades and academic achievements. While those things are certainly important, the people behind these things are what truly matter. While the birds-eye goal of improving self-efficacy and social awareness remain, our school will continue to give voice to our students and to shed light on all of the amazing things that any visitor can easily notice in this small but precious little gift called Northridge Academy High.