

# Leadership program continues to make a difference; considers expanding to other counties

December 9, 2015, by Rachel Davis for the Fayette Tribune



*Several of the class of 2016 Leadership Fayette County students spent some time getting to know one another and themselves better at the orientation session. Pictured, clockwise from top, are Dominic Re, Blake Wingrove, Sarah Koontz, Hannah Franklin, Todd Love, Emma Pino and Tiffanie Carter.*

For fifteen years, the non-profit Fayette County Education Fund has been serving Fayette County students through its unique Leadership Fayette County program. One of a kind in the state of West Virginia, Leadership Fayette County provides programming throughout the eleventh grade year for selected students with monthly sessions focusing on leadership development, public speaking, working in groups, and an understanding of the local economy. At the end of the program, students are awarded at a banquet held in their honor. The banquet is attended by family, friends, program sponsors, and each year boasts a special guest speaker such as Fayette County Circuit Court Judge John W. Hatcher, Jr., singer songwriter John Ellison, United States Magistrate Judge Dwane L. Tinsley, and Rocket Boy Roy Lee Cooke for example.

“Because the Leadership program occurs during the eleventh grade year, it can take a few years to see the long-term results. Leadership program graduates have earned slots in highly competitive medical and veterinary schools, and come back to Fayette County to work in fields such as

education, engineering, accounting, marketing, small business, criminal justice, health care, and others,” said program Chair, Dave Pollard.

In 2013, the Leadership program earned recognition from the Harvard Kennedy School and the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation as a Bright Idea and exemplary community development program. The same year, a West Virginia University Capstone Program study attributed hundreds of thousands of dollars in local economic growth to the Fund programs.

The Fund is working toward the possibility of expanding the Leadership program into nearby counties. Thanks in part to a grant from the United Way of Southern West Virginia, the Fund was recently able to offer one session of the Leadership program to a limited number of Nicholas County students. On Wednesday, November 11, thirty-five students from Fayette and Nicholas Counties came together at Opossum Creek Retreat on their day off from school to take part in an exercise used across the country in college curriculums and leadership training programs called SIMSOC (or simulated society). In SIMSOC, students negotiate their way through sustaining a society while coming face-to-face with issues such as abuse of power, justice, trust, and leadership. As a result of the day-long session students gain an understanding of the many influences that impact our society and our daily lives, and the crucial role of individual choice.



*High school students from Fayette and Nicholas counties give up a day off from school to come together at Opossum Creek Retreat for the Leadership's simulated society session where they gain a new understanding of the influences that impact society and the crucial role of individual choice.*

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*Leadership Fayette County students are actively involved in coaching public speaking techniques at their perspective schools' Middle School Leadership Academy. Here, John Cook uses cell phone video technology to help a few of the Valley students hone their skills through review, discussion and practice.*

Based on the belief that the greater the number of leaders, the greater the potential positive impact in our communities, in 2014 the Fund launched Middle School Leadership Academy to provide junior-high participants a higher level of accountability and a focus on personal development. Meeting in a classroom at Fayette County middle schools once a week for four weeks, the Leadership Academy introduces selected students to various methods and roles of leadership, comprehending the roll of the follower, team building concepts, appropriate use of social media, appreciating the differences in how people process and act on information, and gets them on their way toward improving their skills as a public speaker.

With a successful second year of Middle School Leadership Academy complete, Meadow Bridge High School English teacher, Lisa Goode said, "We, at Meadow Bridge High School, are thrilled that our students are able to participate in both the middle school and high school leadership programs.

Our eighth graders say that they enjoy the different activities that help them become better leaders. Eighth grader, Taylor White, says she enjoyed the Leadership Academy activity where students were challenged to take one

step forward where they discovered something about themselves and their leadership qualities. Brooke Critchley, a junior, says her favorite Leadership program session has been the team building activities at ACE Adventure, and she likes meeting new people and working in groups.

As a teacher, I am so thankful that our students are valued and included in such an initiative that will help prepare them for the 21st century where career and college readiness skills of collaboration and teamwork are so important." Goode is also serves as Chairperson for the English Department, School Leadership and Graduation 20/20.

Fayette County Education Fund, Inc. is a registered 501C3 and relies on community financial support from businesses and individuals. For more information on the Fund and its programs, contact Dave Pollard, Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, 310 Oyler Ave, Oak Hill, WV 25901, by phone at 304-640-3778, or email [dp255116@gmail.com](mailto:dp255116@gmail.com).