

Center focused on outside factors of student success

Midland Daily News on 8/8/04

By Amy Soper of the Daily News

His latest venture began with hallway conversations with a coworker. He was a Midland Public Schools board member and she had some questions about the way the district operated. In the fall of 2003 they agreed on something that could be done to help all children.

Richard Dolinski, a former MPS board member who also will leave his position as a Delta College trustee in December, and Karen Harbron worked together to start The Legacy Center for Student Success. Dolinski is president of the center; Harbron is the operations manager. Gary Hughes, MPS superintendent, and Denise Spencer, CEO of the Midland Area Community Foundation, are trustees. The center at 3200 James Savage Road opened this month and is embarking on its first project.

"I had decided I wanted to continue to do something with education and I would talk to Karen about her son Brady's therapy," Dolinski said. "I still hadn't connected that with this and what I wanted to do."

Brady was struggling with reading in school and had received extra help since kindergarten. In second grade he was going to be tested for a learning problem, but Karen said she knew her son could understand. She also knew he'd failed his eye test at school.

Eventually, Brady learned he had an eye muscle coordination problem that affects how he sees things. He was directed to Steven Kocks of Andersen Eye Associates by his regular optometrist, Scott Buckingham. Brady received vision therapy through Andersen and his reading improved, Karen said. "One day while we were sitting around talking (Karen) said, 'This thing costs nearly \$1,000 for the whole thing. I know we can afford it, but there are other people who can't,'" Dolinski said. "I said maybe we can work something out."

That was last fall. Now that "something" is the center, a research-based organization focused on improving learning for children. And the center's first project is improving students' reading through vision therapy. "My contention is that a very high percentage of kids' success is dependent on factors outside of school. Schools can be perfect and kids for different reasons still won't do well," Dolinski said. He attributed lack of success to factors outside of school such as environment, wellness and readiness. "Those are factors that it's difficult for schools to do anything about." He added that about 10 percent of a student's life from birth through high school is spent in the classroom and while much research has been done on in-school factors that affect learning, there's not much research on outside factors.

The center will conduct research to identify factors outside of school that impede learning, design and develop interventions, and deliver interventions. With vision

therapy, research has been done and interventions developed. The center will coordinate delivering the intervention. At the same time, the non-profit Legacy Center will seek out researchers at institutions of higher learning and support their research to work to identify factors outside of school that impede learning, Dolinski said. That research could evolve into future projects to help all students.

"Our scope is well beyond Midland. Our intention is to take whatever results we get and apply them in the area of most need," Dolinski said. "Our vision is to make it nationwide."

For more information about The Legacy Center call (989) 496-1425.
Reporter Amy Soper can be reached at amysoper@mdn.net or (989) 839-4273.