

Legacy Center: New program study seeks to improve student success

Midland High's Focus Online on December 22, 2004

By Nakul Shankar, Staff Writer

Dick Dolinski served on Midland Public School's Board of Education for nearly 18 years. However, in May of 2004, he left the Board and founded a project that continued his interest in education.

The Legacy Center for Student Success, located on the corner of Waldo and James Savage roads, has been in operation since August. Dolinski created the center because of certain problems that weren't being addressed in today's education system.

"We, as a country, have a big debate going on about what's appropriate and what's not in school," Dolinski said. "Unfortunately, there isn't a lot of attention being paid to factors like the students' environment at home, wellness issues, and readiness issues."

The Legacy Center is a non-profit research institution for non-school related factors that impede student success.

"Facts matter a lot. I don't want this to be ideological or theoretical. I want this to be data-driven and fact-based," Dolinski said.

They are implementing a three step method to address these issues.

"The first part is to do research, to identify the factors, what the barriers are," Dolinski said. "Part two is to then go and develop various interventions. Part three is to deliver and implement these interventions."

Their first project deals with the concept of vision therapy.

"It turns out that some students have eye muscle and movement coordination problems," Dolinski said, "When this happens to children, words appear to dance on the page."

However, this can be corrected in about 15 weeks through various eye exercises.

One hundred first-graders in the Midland Public Schools have been chosen to participate in the study. Dr. Steve Kocks of Andersen Eye Associates will perform vision tests for them, and the Lions Club of Midland will be paying for students who can't afford the glasses. Reading tests will be given to the students before and after the 15-week therapy program.

"If you look at the national studies, you'll find that one quarter of all children have some type of vision difficulty. We're expecting to find about 20 -25 children that we'll be able to help," Kocks said. "We have seen positive results in many children already [who have had vision therapy], but this time we're approaching it in a very scientific manner."

The results will be published, and if the experiment goes as planned, the Legacy Center will seek more funding.

Dolinski is very passionate about getting a quality education to as many students as possible.

“[Have you] heard the starfish story? [A] little boy is walking on the beach, and it’s at low tide. At high tide, the starfish are floating, and at low tide, when the tide goes out, some of the starfish get stranded on the beach, and they die,” Dolinski said. “So this little boy is picking up the starfish, and throwing them back in the ocean, and a wise man comes by. ‘Little boy! There are thousands of starfish here, you can’t possibly [throw them all back in the ocean]!’ The little boy, undaunted, picks one up, throws it back into the ocean, and replies, ‘But I can make a difference for that one.’ And that’s all we’re trying to do. We’re trying to make a difference. We know we’re not going to save everybody.”