



#### Press Release: IMPACT

Helping students in need connect with their school and community is a primary goal of IMPACT at Washington Community High School. Coordinators of the program are seeking local sponsors to help provide critical support for the 2015-16 school year.

The program, launched at WCHS in March 2014, involves about 18 students in projects that benefit both the participants and the Washington community. The projects provide experiences that sharpen student skills, improve their intrinsic motivation and increase their self-confidence. The peripheral effects of the projects boost community interests and the welfare of citizens.

“Many of the students have not had much success in the school or community,” Nick Pacelli, IMPACT coordinator, said. “Achieving success in the community through service projects and in school with grades will give them the confidence to succeed in other areas of their life.”

IMPACT is an acronym for **I**nspire, **M**otivate, **P**ride, **A**chieve, **C**ommit and **T**rust.

“The program creates a great way for students to build a trust relationship as well as a good working relationship with staff to help achieve important goals,” Gina Arrenholz, IMPACT staff assistant, said.

IMPACT places students who may be struggling in academics, discipline or attendance at the center of decision-making that impacts not only the school but also the whole community, the faculty coordinators said. The projects help develop initiative and leadership skills.

“The project is typically an idea students have brainstormed together,” Pacelli said. “Then it becomes student-centered, and the students work together to create, develop and implement the project.”

For example, in February a junior in the program developed a project to deliver Valentine’s Day cards to local nursing homes.

“The student contacted Moehle’s Assisted Living Center in Washington and the Washington Christian Home to coordinate a day and time to bring Valentine cards to residents,” Pacelli said.

The student then led IMPACT members at each facility.

“It was very different than what I am used to doing,” the student said. “I am not too good at talking or setting things up like that, so it helped with those skills.”

“That was my favorite project, because it was very gratifying to see their [nursing home residents] responses. They were very happy about it. I have enjoyed helping out the community in multiple ways. It made me think a bit more about the community. It has gotten me more interested in volunteering.”

Pacelli said the student took every initiative in planning and implementing the project. He said he never talked to the nursing home coordinators until the IMPACT group arrived at Washington Christian Home.

Pacelli said the student was struggling academically last year. “He was failing three academic classes and was showing very little motivation to improve,” Pacelli said. “Not only did the student end up passing those three classes last year, he has also passed all classes this year with A’s and B’s. He has become an active participant in classes, a leader in IMPACT and an advocate for himself.”

Almost all of the returning students to the program have improved academically and behaviorally from last year to this year. In addition, Pacelli said that student behavior and grades continued to improve throughout this school year. Though Pacelli recognizes that students still have difficulties at times.

“This is a process that takes time,” Pacelli said. “It is a rollercoaster sometimes. Students will be on the way up and then something will bring them down. The key is to teach them and for them to learn that being up is much better than being down.”

While the data shows student improvement, Pacelli explains that success can not always be looked at simply through data.

“Sometimes a student will still be struggling with attendance or academics, but we know that IMPACT is keeping this student in school and hopefully giving [him/her] tools that will help them succeed for the years following high school,” Pacelli said.

Students set goals two weeks before a leadership project.

“The goals are typically based on classes that the students are struggling in,” Pacelli said.

For example, if Student A comes to school two to three days a week, the goal would be to increase attendance to four of the five days, according to Arrenholz.

“Academics, social life, and home are all discussed,” Pacelli said. “It is a way to stay connected.”

Weekly reports to students inform them that certain grades need to be brought up by a specific date. This helps to assure that students will meet their goals and participate in the leadership project.

Pacelli said that next year IMPACT will be entirely student-led and project based.

“We want students brainstorming the ideas, developing the projects, contacting businesses, and then implementing it,” Pacelli said. “This is how they become leaders.”

Giving students the lead in project-based learning significantly improves students' self-esteem, motivation, engagement, citizenship skills, teamwork and accountability." Among the many projects the students were a part of this year includes setting up for Wildlife "Scary" Park, really prairie park at Halloween time. Students served hot chocolate, split wood for bonfires, decorated, dressed up in costumes to scare along haunted trails and the train ride.

They also participated in Project Linus with Central Junior High to make blankets for children who are in need of comfort from natural disasters, homelessness, illness, etc. Students also helped at the Salvation Army by making sandwiches and serving lunch to the homeless/less fortunate and cleaning the facility.

"IMPACT is always evolving," Pacelli said. "Every day we're trying to find ways to make IMPACT more productive for the students."

One project Arrenholz said they are looking into is a Senior Citizen Prom next February for all elderly citizens living in the community of Washington.

"This will require IMPACT students to develop a theme, research the theme, contact local businesses for donations, create a menu, advertise the Prom, and implement all of it into one day," Arrenholz said.

The IMPACT staff team includes Karen Stevens, Director of Student Services; Holly Davis, Dean; Becky Drum, Response to Intervention specialist; Arrenholz and Pacelli.

Anyone interested in sponsoring IMPACT should contact Nick Pacelli, IMPACT coordinator, at 309-339-9179 or on Facebook at WCHS IMPACT.