

## PHS' Peer Group Connection provides unique bonding experience

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A group of freshmen and upperclassmen at Person High School have been bonding in a unique way this semester as participants in the new Peer Group Connection (PGC) leadership program.

Through the program, developed to help ninth-graders with the transition to high school, 25 juniors and seniors began serving this year as peer mentors to a group of approximately 130 high school freshmen.

The program is being funded through a dropout prevention grant Person County Schools received earlier this year.

The student mentors went through an application process to become members of the yearlong PGC leadership class, in which they are trained to facilitate weekly discussions and activities with freshmen.

The freshmen are divided into groups of 10 to 15, with each group assigned two peer mentors.

Adult mentor Angelas Hunt, who serves to connect freshman with various services, said the student mentors were doing a "great job."

She continued by saying not only do the mentors conduct hour-long activity sessions with their groups each Thursday, but they also check in with their mentees throughout the week.

Peer mentor Cinzia Petty, a senior at PHS, told *The Courier-Times* she has "a good group of kids" who listen and want to learn. She said they as mentors are like friends to their mentees, reminding them to stop them in the hallways if they need help or someone to talk to.

Petty shared that one student gave her a note about something she had wanted to tell her, and later the two were able to discuss the issue together.

The group culminated the first semester by hosting a family night on Monday at PHS.

Families of the freshmen and upperclassmen in the PGC program were invited to the PHS library Monday to learn about some of the things their children had been doing over the semester.



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**A group of parents, assisted by Peer Group Connection student mentors, discuss parent/child relationships while student attendees listen on, during a "fish bowling" exercise Monday as part of the PGC family night.**

PGC teacher Allison Bowers explained to parents that the peer mentors had been working this past semester with freshmen on things like communication and test-taking skills.

Other skills peer mentors learn through the course include team-building, group facilitation, problem solving, decision-making, time management and handling academic pressures.

After viewing a skit put on by some of the student mentors demonstrating the importance of parent/teen interaction, attendees were divided into two groups to participate in an activity similar to ones the students had done during the semester.

During the "fish bowling" activity, in which a group of people is involved in a discussion while another group listens, parents were given the opportunity to participate in a guided discussion while student attendees listened. Next, students discussed while parents took on the roles of observers.

Parents discussed questions such as, "Why do parents repeat themselves a lot?" and "What is the most important thing you have learned from your children?"

Student questions included, "How do kids handle being compared to brothers and sisters, either negatively or positively?" and "What do teens like to talk about with their parents, and what topics do they avoid?"

Mentor Corey Bailey told *The C-T* he loved working with his mentees, and that he looks forward to seeing them graduate high school.

Tomease Higgins, one of the freshmen mentees, said the program offered him and his fellow freshmen participants a place to talk to other students their own age, and a place to talk about their problems and learn how to fix them.

Higgins said he's learned more about having better relationships with friends, and how to make new friends.

He said it's also been helpful having a mentor to talk to and get help with homework.

Higgins also said he hopes the program will be available to other ninth-graders in the future.

Mentor and PHS junior Allison Daye shared that she thinks the program is a great experience for both mentee and mentor, as it gives mentors the chance to learn about themselves and ways to improve their leadership skills.

She added that parent participation in their children's lives is key to the program's success, and said she hopes the program will be continued in the future.

"I've seen tremendous growth in the kids," said mentor Tyrell Perry.

He said that bonds had been created between mentors and mentees.

Mentor Jasmine McCullum said it had been interesting hearing her mentees points-of-view, and said participating in the program has helped her to be more understanding and considerate of perspectives different from her own.

If it weren't for the program, McCullum said, she probably wouldn't have gotten to know most of the freshmen she's been working with.

She added, "I wish them all luck."