

Dear Innovation Board:

The program I propose is one to help KenTon's young people enjoy the fun of living with difference as opposed to treating diversity like a problem. It is a program that I helped to develop during the early part of my career as a middle school ELA teacher on Long Island. There, it was a program for 8<sup>th</sup> graders called TACK, Tolerance Acceptance Caring and Kindness. When I presented the concept to Ms. Jarros at Hoover Middle School, she thought it might fit in well for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Hoover because it seemed to fit as a logical extension of their current peer mentoring/buddy program, WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) so she informally dubbed it WEB 6.0. It is important to note that this program is not simply about teaching white children to understand others. This program is about helping all children manage differences of many kinds, and that there is something interesting and unique about each of us not just those from non-mainstream cultures.

WEB 6.0 has large and small group components that work together to promote pro-social behavior among students, improve peer interactions, and give kids a sense of ownership over the social atmosphere of the school by giving them direct instruction and practice in addressing differences in a safe, structured environment. A side benefit to the program is that it provides infrastructure for teachers and administrators to use to reach kids in times of crisis and gives them a window into the on-going social climate in the building. Ms. Jaros thought it might also serve as a tier 2 behavior intervention. If it is well received, it could also be expanded to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade levels to combat the dropout rate. This program helped us to address our students' needs, at both the population and individual levels in the wake of the World Trade Center Attacks. We were glad we already had it in place.

In its original form, this program changed the environment at the middle school with a three pronged approach. First, membership in the group carried the responsibility to not only conduct yourself in a "TACK-like" way but to alert a mentor if you saw a peer struggling socially. While obviously this was not immediately 100% effective at eliminating social isolation at school, over time we saw it begin to change the social climate in the school by giving kids a specific channel for pointing out concerns to an adult, and by asking them to take ownership of

their peer community. Similarly, students were asked to begin to catch their peers doing something right and to celebrate these things in a variety of small ways over the course of the year as part of the program. This was part of what made participation a lot of fun. Activities included:

1. Kids giving out “Gotcha’s” (our version of dragon scales) when they catch someone they don’t know doing something kind.
2. Eating lunch with a new person.
3. Volunteering to spend time with students in our 8:1:1: special education classes (students with physical disabilities and other challenges)
4. Leaving someone who needs it a “friendship rock.”

After a while, the climate in the building shifted. There were pleasant surprises around many corners.

The small and large group meetings were structured to be interactive and fun with very little lecture. In its most evolved form, the program included lesson plans for, each small group meeting. Each meeting was dedicated to exploring one concrete area of difference or behavior in a fun way, but always with the guidance of an adult mentor to manage any teachable moments that arose. Examples of topics covered by these activities included, the “when, how and to whom” of asking questions about difference, how to talk about difference when describing people (to describe people by race or not?), how to react to food that is unusual, unexpected or different, how to suspend judging someone who behaves in a way you find unusual or difficult, and how to interact with people with varying difficulties/differences both visible and invisible, how to support someone being picked on for a difference. I would be happy to share my notes on these activities so that concrete lesson plans can be offered to mentors, eliminating their need to prepare for small group meetings.

Large group meetings were scheduled for 3 times a year and were conducted during the school day during the last two periods of the day. Invited students were permitted to miss class. The first large group meeting was devoted to a very brief orientation and then a concrete activity focused on allowing students to broaden their social network and be introduced to

their small group members. The second meeting, held before the February break included a speaker of interest to the kids, usually a community member speaking about their own personal experience with difference, and followed by refreshments and another brief activity. The third large group meeting was a general wrap up of the year followed by a reflective activity and another practice session of some kind.

#### Anticipated Outcomes:

The goals of WEB would be to encourage student engagement in the school, increase prosocial behavior, decrease conflict and allow students to feel a sense of ownership in the school. These outcomes could be measured in two ways, by recording levels of participation in the program over time and through survey data recorded at the beginning and end of each year of the program with special attention paid to recording of baseline data.

#### Tasks:

1. One-time preparation (perhaps use CO2 time over the summer): 1 – 1.5 days
  - a. Prepare materials:
    - i. Make/secure buttons or stickers to identify members
    - ii. Write contract
    - iii. Print contracts
    - iv. Design mentor training
    - v. Tweak (design) lesson plans for small group meetings (single investment of time)
    - vi. Plan large group activities (x2, fall and spring)
2. Yearly Preparation
  - a. Make or secure buttons/ stickers to identify participating members
  - b. Create signs to draw new members (can be done by previous year's students)
  - c. Print contracts
  - d. Schedule 2 large group meetings with building principal
  - e. Identify faculty mentors for the following year
  - f. Train new mentors, update previous mentors
    - i. Time commitment, role, dealing with diversity issues/ sensitivity (as program grows)
    - ii. Gather their ideas for how to improve/change/grow the program.
  - g. Find speakers for large group meetings.
3. Regular participation:
  - a. Coordinators:
    - i. Availability daily if possible to manage social issues that are brought to the attention of WEB mentors/ support mentors
    - ii. Check in with mentors at times of small group meetings, address any issues.
  - b. Faculty Mentors:

- i. Small group meetings one lunch period per month
- ii. Availability as a “safe space” for participating kids to report problems or come for help.
- iii. Possible availability for large group meetings.

#### Projected costs

1. Program Coordinator: 3 options
  - a. Most economical: teacher club funds
  - b. Moderate investment: Part time person to help organize(mental health—counselor—could help with existing check in check out)
  - c. Largest commitment: Full- time person to run mentor programs in 4,<sup>th</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> and grades 9<sup>th</sup> grades to provide continuity of message across the district.

This person could run this program in the feeder schools. This could be a tier 2 behavioral intervention for east side/ west side. It also provides continuity of vision across the district thereby addressing equity issues.

2. Yearly Costs:
  - a. CO2 funding for mentors to do prep over the summer
  - b. Mentor compensation (counts as a duty if meetings are in during lunch, clubs money if meetings are school)
  - c. Refreshments/supplies for small group meetings: \$500/ year
  - d. Refreshments/supplies for large group meetings: \$300/year
3. Implementation timeline:
  - a. Find faculty mentors: 2 months—we can start as small as we like, with 2-4 mentors and just 30 kids, (about 8 per mentor).
  - b. Find a coordinator- ?? this is proving to be the biggest challenge.
  - c. 1- 1.5 days with 3 adults working to prepare materials.
  - d. 1 day with 3 adults working to prepare plans for small and large-group meetings. (I have template materials to support this process initially)