

Winners Walk Tall

*Aiken University High School
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Children in Cincinnati elementary schools followed in the footsteps of high school students in making positive life choices as part of the Winners Walk Tall character development program.

The program has been part of the Cincinnati Public School's K-2 curriculum since 1992. In the past, local community leaders taught the lessons. In 2003, staff from Aiken High School proposed that students in grades 10-12 take the lead. Aiken's staff believed that the character lessons would have more impact on youngsters if they were taught by older peers. High school students, in turn, would experience and understand the importance of being positive role models.

School administrators advertise the program every year through school newsletters and daily announcements. They also send personalized letters and permission slips for prospective applicants home to parents.

Between 10 and 14 high school students participate in the program each year. Student-teachers, dubbed Character Captains by school administration, pair with one elementary school classroom each year. The captains work in pairs to develop lesson plans from a list of suggested topics provided by the Winners Walk Tall organization.

Every Thursday, Character Captains don pink hats and buttons and present a 20 minute lesson in front of their assigned classroom. Lessons often include an engaging performance, including song and dance routines, or personal stories that teach about honesty, peer pressure, and remembering to say "please" and "thank you."

High school students who want to participate must maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and a 98% attendance record. They also are asked to make up all classes that they miss when they teach in the elementary school. Character Captains that fall below the minimum requirements relinquish their title until they regain the

required GPA and attendance rate.

Winners Walk Talk continues to receive rave reviews from both students and teachers. One elementary school teacher pointed to the significant impact one Character Captain has had on her classroom. "Terrance developed a rapport with my students on the very first day. The kids were listening to every word he said. Each week, they know which day to expect him and they can hardly wait for him to arrive. During the week, I hear them reminding each other about the lessons they have learned."

The program has proved so popular with high school students over the past few years that administrators have had to turn down a significant number of prospective Character Captain applicants. The chief draw, other than resume building, is the opportunity to impact so many young lives.

"I had no idea that teaching was so hard, but I really like the way kids pay attention and ask questions. That lets me know that what I'm saying makes sense to them. It makes me feel like I'm important and have a lot to offer to others," one high school student said.

The program costs \$2,200 annually to implement. Funds come from the Hamilton County Family and Children First Council and the Winners Walk Tall organization.

School administration plans to continue the program next year. They will partner with a new elementary school because the current partner-school is closing.

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