
PROJECT CONNECT

Chaska High School

Chaska, Minnesota

Chaska High School developed Project Connect to promote violence-free, safe schools, families, and communities through building meaningful interpersonal relationships. The project responded to district goals to increase student achievement and to strengthen the sense of community. The project coordinators felt that recent violent acts perpetrated by young people had a common denominator: a lack of a sense of connectedness to peers and adults.

Project Connect began in the spirit of community collaboration. In March of 2000, representatives from eighteen agencies convened at Chaska High School to discuss violence prevention. These agencies included: Carver County Sheriff's Department, School District 112, Ridgeview Medical Center, Chaska Ministerium, among many others. The District Involvement Coordinators took the input from this meeting and spent a weekend retreat developing what came to be known as Project Connect. The plan was then presented to the District 112 administrative team in August of 2000.

Project Connect's multifaceted approach began with an assessment of student perspectives. The team developed and conducted a student survey for grades 4-12 to find out students' feelings of connectedness and sense of safety, and where and how students connect. Based on the survey results, the team planned a district symposium to showcase community activities that facilitate connection between students and adults; wrote six informational news releases for the local paper and school newsletters to provide families with supportive information and activities; and hosted a Parents as Partners event at each school building to provide a focus on violence-free relationships and communities. The team also launched a Personal Connection Campaign in which students were personally greeted everyday by an adult. School guidance counselors assisted in implementing this practice in the school buildings. Furthermore, Project Connect linked Chaska High School students with middle and elementary school students and developed a catalogue of activities that connect high school students and younger students.

Two highlights of Project Connect were the *Celebrate the Ways We Connect* community celebration, which over 400 community people attended, and the *2001 Mentor Catalogue*. These events involved:

National Network of Partnership Schools

Johns Hopkins University

Promising Partnership

Practices

- Nomination and celebration of 92 outstanding mentors;
- Participation of fifteen community agencies that promote mentoring opportunities in a mentoring fair; and
- Distribution of a mentor catalogue outlining 14 mentoring opportunities.

A grant for Project Connect funded by Pillsbury Foundation made possible the community celebration and the publication and distribution of the mentor catalogue.

Project Connect promotes the principles of developing meaningful connections to support learners of all ages.

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