

The Redding Pilot

Keeping the 'earn' in learn: Barlow students promote integrity

Written by Jennifer Wastrom

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The Joel Barlow High School's Achieving With Integrity Committee is working to put "the earn back in Learn," as part of a project is aimed at promoting academic engagement and honesty in Connecticut high schools. In front, from left, are Mia Jacobson, Stephanie Colasante, Caity Taylor and Carol DeSalva. In back, Max Schwear, Lori Estes, Catherine Correa, Mary Atkinson, Paula Schwear, Head of

School Tom McMorran, Paula Panos, Jamie Prusak and Patrick Murphy. Not pictured is Julie Gorman. — Jennifer Wastrom photo

Here's a shocking statistic: 85% of college students surveyed report having cheated in high school (Science Daily, August 2009). Whether it's the intense pressure to succeed, or a societal watered down sense of right and wrong, academic dishonesty is rampant. But at Joel Barlow High School, something's being done about it.

Barlow is one of six schools in Connecticut participating in the Achieving With Integrity Project. Organized by Dr. Jason M. Stephens of UConn's Department of Educational Psychology and Dr. David B. Wangaard of the School for Ethical Education, this three-year intervention project is aimed at promoting academic engagement and honesty in Connecticut high schools.

Each school was asked to develop and implement an approach to promote integrity in the school. If any of the projects are successful, they may be expanded to more schools in the state and perhaps become an anti-cheating model that schools across the U.S. may use.

Head of School Tom McMorran is particularly enthusiastic about his school's involvement in this statewide initiative to curb cheating.

"Given the pressures brought to bear on students these days, to exceed expectations in all academic disciplines while simultaneously being active in extracurricular, volunteer and athletic programs, it is not surprising that some find themselves compromising their sense of right and wrong. Rather than shake the finger of shame at students, our AWIC (Achieving With Integrity Committee) has consistently attempted to uplift a positive example. We aren't trying to "catch" those who cheat so much as we are trying to provide support for acts of integrity."

Under the leadership of faculty member Catherine Correa, AWIC chairperson, parent volunteer Paula Schwear and student co-presidents Caity Taylor and Stephanie Colasante, Barlow's Achieving With Integrity Committee started with a student survey to establish the level and reasons for academic dishonesty. From there they developed a plan, starting with the creation of a slogan and logo for the initiative: "Keep the Earn in Learn...Achieving With Integrity at JBHS."

Their first campaign, "Got Integrity?" was launched last May, during which they invited the student body to participate in an Achieving With Integrity Pledge signing. "Got Integrity?" posters were hung throughout the school, featuring students selected as poster kids for integrity by the faculty and their peers. This campaign went on to win the "Special Project Award" in the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education's 2009 Awards of Excellence for Educational Communication Contest.

The second campaign, "You Got It ...We Caught It," has just been released. Ms. Schwear explained the gist of the program.

"The AWIC has secretly designated JBHS Mystery Spotters who, for a period of three weeks, will be on the lookout for students demonstrating integrity. When they spot someone, they will announce 'You Got It and We Caught It!' and give him/her an INTEGRITY wristband. JBHS Security will take their 'mug shot,' and their name and photo will be featured on the INTEGRITY Wanted Poster displayed in the lobby."

Dr. Wangaard has shared Barlow's creative success with the other schools participating in the project. He noted that the AWIC at Barlow has been particularly creative with the positive energy of parents, students and faculty.

"Barlow has formed a great team to promote its vision for achieving with integrity. They are using the resources this project has provided to help

build awareness and commitment to behaviors that demonstrate integrity," he said.

"Integrity should remain a building block of our community — not just in the classroom but in the halls, on the stage, on the field and in our every day," said Caity Taylor, student co-president. "The AWIC promotes just that. Even more, we strive to celebrate those who have integrity, instead of reprimanding those who don't."

Co-president Stephanie Colasante agrees. "It isn't an easy feat trying to convince 900+ students that having integrity and promoting it is 'cool' or worthwhile. The stressed-out junior in the media center isn't thinking about the integrity he may be lacking while copying a physics worksheet to try to maintain his 4.0 GPA to get into the Ivy League of his choice. Our recent campaigns and initiatives have attempted to show students that this really is a cause worth fighting for."

There are a number of other students active in the AWIC, including sophomore Max Schwear, who has produced all of the visuals for the two campaigns, Carol DeSalva, Mia Jacobson, Patrick Murphy and Jesse Shayne. Parent volunteers Julie Gorman and Jamie Prusak have been committee advisers. The AWIC is seeking new volunteers to help with the efforts this spring, and will be actively recruiting students next fall, as their co-presidents will be graduating.

For more information, or to become a part of the Achieving With Integrity Committee, contact ccorrea@region9ps.org. There will also be an opportunity to speak with the AWIC members at Barlow Palooza, on May 27, from 4 to 8 p.m. (Barlow Palooza is a schoolwide celebration of the activities and achievements at the high school. It is open to the community.)

Those seeking more information about the project or school strategies that promote integrity may visit The School for Ethical Education's Web site at www.ethicsed.org and click on the Integrity Works tab.

This article was contributed on behalf of the Barlow PTSA.