Leadership Hart Youth Helps Hart County High School Students Learn to Lead

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Developing a pipeline of leaders with skills to work with others to benefit the community has been a key priority since the Hart County Archway Partnership began in 2008. Building upon success in revitalizing the adult leadership program over the past several years, Hart County Chamber of Commerce leaders decided to expand their focus to include youth leadership development. A local planning committee was formed in partnership with Hart County High School, the Hart County Archway Partnership, and generous financial support from Hart EMC Foundation and Oglethorpe Power.

The goal of Leadership Hart Youth is to identify and foster youth leaders who are reflective of the community and encourage them to become more involved in their school and community. Leadership development is the primary focus of the program, which is built upon the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development's *Youth in Action* curriculum. A Hart EMC Foundation Operation Round Up grant enabled the planning committee to purchase the curriculum and host a train-the-trainer workshop led by Fanning Institute faculty members to develop local facilitators.

The Spring 2015 pilot program of Leadership Hart Youth included 17 sophomores and juniors who participated in monthly sessions from January-May. Fanning Institute faculty facilitated an opening retreat that focused on what makes a good leader, individual and group leadership styles, and effective communication. Class members also participated in experiential activities including team-building at Fanning’s outdoor leadership lab. Monthly sessions were led by local instructors and included visits to local community facilities.

Leadership Hart Youth planning committee chair, Kim Pierce, shared the impact of the program: "Since the implementation of the leadership program, we have watched individuals become more aware of their self value. Those who began the program with doubts about their abilities ended the program with the realization that they had the power to make a significant change in their school and community."

Starting in Fall 2015, Leadership Hart Youth will be held each year and run from September through early Spring. Youth alumni from previous classes will assist with subsequent classes, allowing peers to nominate each other for the program and to learn from each other.

**Advancing Community Priorities**

This project met the community-identified priorities of developing community leaders as well as preparing Hart County Schools students for the future. Having a well-developed process for identifying and fostering local leaders, beginning with youth, is essential to civic engagement and to workforce development. Alumni from the pilot class have already become involved in volunteer opportunities in the community and are helping to recruit the next class.