

# NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TIMES

## Fayetteville students of all ages partner for district-wide project to help food bank

BY BRETT BENNETT

A food drive is a fairly common service project to help the needy, but the Fayetteville School District is hoping to make an impact through its first district-wide student food drive this year.

All of the district's schools sent student representatives to attend a leadership rally to kick off the food drive Tuesday morning at the Fayetteville High School auditorium. The district brought in professional speaker and author Paul Vitale to help motivate the students and give them words of encouragement.

"Today is about you as leaders," Vitale said. "If we establish a course and stick with it, we'll be successful."

The food drive is part of a partnership project the district has developed with Tyson Foods and the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank. From now to Nov. 15, students will collect food to be given to the needy.

"I'm ready to go as soon as I get back to school," Owl Creek seventh-grader Caitlin Brothers said. "I hope we have a lot of kids (at Owl Creek) who are just as excited as I am."

Assistant Superintendent Dick Johnson said the project was also about fulfilling the district's strategic goal to teach 21st century skills through co-curricular and extracurricular activities. About 340 students were selected to attend the leadership rally from the district's 14 schools.

While schools have frequently held individual food drives as service projects, it is not often that elementary and secondary students come together to work for a common goal, he noted. Some of the youngest students selected to attend the event were from the second grade, which was exemplified when Vitale called a senior, seventh-grader and second-grader onto the stage at one point.

"There are a lot of byproducts that come with these activities," Johnson said. "We don't have many situations where second-graders sit in with high school and junior high kids with a positive purpose."

FHS senior Lauren Whitmore said it was a good idea to involve younger students.

"I think it's easier to get them involved because they're so enthusiastic anyway," she said.

"If you're here, somebody thinks you're a leader," Johnson told the students.

Johnson compared the number of students in the district — fall enrollment is around 8,400 students — to a city. With that many people working together, they can have a large impact on Northwest Arkansas, he suggested.

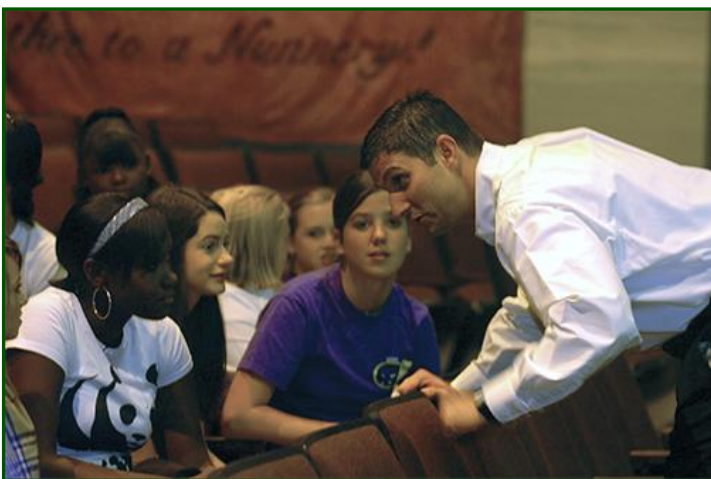
"Our school community is bigger than any towns that surround us to the south, east and west," he noted.

Vitale, based in Little Rock, discussed how to inspire and set examples for others. Author of the book "Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life," Vitale gave the students advice about staying positive and persistent as they work on the project.

"We achieve to the degree that we overcome the negative," he said. "Remember, we simply have to make a choice, either flow with the current or rise above it. You have the power to do whatever you set your mind on doing, and at the end of the day, what you do matters." ■

*©2007 Vital Communications, Inc.*

*— Paul Vitale, professional speaker and author, presents keynote presentations and seminars around the globe. For additional information, visit [paulvitale.com](http://paulvitale.com) or call 501-663-1454 or 501-868-8195.*



Motivational speaker Paul Vitale visits Tuesday with Fayetteville students before a leadership conference in the Fayetteville High School auditorium. Around 340 student leaders from all of the Fayetteville Public Schools were selected to hear Vitale's speech and the announcement of two district-wide initiatives.