

Pangburn initiative spreading

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More than 100 school districts in Arkansas are on board with a new online program that was developed at Pangburn High School.

"We have over a hundred schools in Arkansas who have signed up for **Peak Performance U** and thanks to the leadership of Pangburn and to the Department of Career Education, we are making progress," said professional speaker Paul Vitale, who has partnered with the school district to create the now mandatory, structured online program for students.

It has been only one year since the program was started, according to Pangburn High School Principal David Rolland, yet the number of school districts participating out of 288 in the state is indicative of a soon-to-be statewide movement.

"The idea behind the course is to prepare kids for the skills that are needed for life outside of high school and to go either to college or into the workplace," Rolland said.

The 81-lesson course given to students when they begin high school and running through graduation teaches them a broad spectrum of professional skills and character-building ethics, according to Rolland.

Peak Performance U is centered on nine essential units, each of which consists of nine lessons. The first unit, "Sturdy Work Ethic," focuses on timeliness, problem solving, dependability, time management, accountability, humility and determination.

"These are skills that you would think would not be uncommon. Being dependable should be second nature, but it's not something people even discuss anymore," Rolland said.

"Paul did an assembly here. We approached him about the idea that we had talked to businesses and people in

HR departments who said that they just cannot find qualified workers who have skills that are needed to be successful in the workplace."

Pangburn High School student and intern Tylar Vernon said **Peak Performance U**

"covers the essential skills that are needed in the workplace, that in the past have been taught, but in this generation, they are not."

"So the workplace is saying that 'Hey, we need workers that show up on time or [know] how to respect authority,' and so through the program I think that they're preparing kids for the workplace and giving them a step up from the kids that don't go through this program."

Lessons of **Peak Performance U** include, but are not limited to body language, résumé development, table manners, civility, common courtesy and class, compassion/forgiveness, relationships, assertiveness, gossip, character, cell phone usage, taking responsibility, loyalty, humbleness, goal-setting, financial literacy and winning/losing gracefully.

"Cell phones can either be a good tool or a hindrance to your job performance," Rolland said regarding the lesson on cell phones.

"Social media, that's a big one. Tolerance is a really important one, too," he added.

A special lesson also has been designed around grammar and punctuation; a less complex subject that is typically learned by elementary school-aged children. However, as younger generations adapt to and rely

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on digital devices for communications, things like grammar and punctuation are often disregarded and replaced with shorthand slang.

Each topic is one unit. Two units take around nine weeks to complete, according to Rolland.

INTERN EFFORT

Along with Vitale and Rolland, the program has been the result of a collaborative effort of six student interns, who aided in the content creation last year by traveling the state to interview industry leaders, including Governor Asa Hutchinson and KARK Channel 4 news anchor Mallory Brooks.

Interviewees offered their personal insight and advice to students in recorded videos that are now used in conjunction with the lessons taught.

"We got their input on why these essential skills are important and how they have helped them in their career," Vernon said.

Rolland said that "each class has an objective, an introduction and some of them have videos. It just has everything that a normal class would have."

Worksheets and "real-life scenarios" are included as part of each lesson, Vernon said, "and they go with videos that come from these high-up industry

leaders and from professional athletes. It really ties it all together about the importance of the lesson.”

Brooks told students that when bosses are hiring, they may often see great résumés and find incredibly



Rolland said teachers, business partners, corporation owners, and news media were all talked to and asked “what they thought the keys to success were, and that’s how this course was developed.”

ONLINE ETIQUETTE

Brooks offered advice in a video on responsibility in the digital realm of social media, an important element of the **Peak Performance U** lesson plan, called social media etiquette.

“Online bullying is an epidemic and I hope it ends soon,” Brooks said in the video. “It’s out of control. In our business [news media], we get it all the time. I get emails from people about my hair, that it looks bad that morning, my eyelashes look bad, that I didn’t finish my lips, that I messed up on a story. I just can’t believe that people take the time to go and email or message something hateful to try and bring somebody down. I hope it’s something you’ll think about. It’s not kind.

“Plus, these things follow you; it sticks with you. There’s a trail of every single thing you do online. I know they say the snapshot thing goes away after 10 seconds...no, everything sticks with you.”

talented people that they are ready to hire, but after viewing the candidates’ social media sites, may change their minds based on what they see.

“You may think it’s private, but people find a way to get to it and they’ll see something and say, ‘Nope, not going to hire them,’ because of something maybe said in the past on social media. I promise it sticks with you, so think before you type.”

On the subject of bullying, she added, “We all get hateful mail and messages, so don’t be a part of it, rise above.”

“If you’re getting it, it’s awful,” Brooks said. “Just try to move on and think this person obviously is not that big of a person. So I’m just going to keep working and show them it’s not going to bother me a bit. They want to see you upset and when you’re not, you’ve won. Kill them with kindness.”

Rolland said the message from Brooks is “two-fold.”

“It’s talking about how social media will affect you and impact you in the workplace, but also shows to me that somebody like her also gets criticized and bullied, so you’re not alone,” he said. “It [the video] kind of shows [students] how to respond to that stuff.”

The second unit of nine offered to students through **Peak Performance U** is called “Human Dignity,” which is comprised of lessons on listening, respecting authority, tolerance, diversity, sobriety, self-control, appearance and respect.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

“I have been asked to be involved in the program as an outsider to observe and to give my input on the value of the nine essential skills that they’re working on,” said Harding University graduate Allen Figley of Searcy, who has a corporate background in business.

“A personal perspective on this is that this is the best program that I’ve seen K-12, or I’d even say in higher education, from what I’ve seen. They’re being exposed to the essential skills that will help provide the opportunity that will help them become great communicators, great team workers, and to be successful whether or not they’re going on to higher education or directly into the workforce.

“A value that I see to prospective employers down the line is they [the students] are identified as graduates of Pangburn School District. They [employers] know what this program is and what these students have been exposed to; things that they’re interested in. So as this grows and continues to develop that identity of association [with Pangburn] will apply.

“Whether it’s from timeliness, technology, or using your cell phone at work to knowing the things that employers expect, being able to work with other people, being at work on time, which is hard for a lot of people to do; a lot of these things should be considered common sense, but I know that a lot of HR managers would love to have their incoming employees proficient in these nine essential skills.”

BEING PREPARED

In another video made for the program, Green Bay Packers wide

receiver Jordy Nelson offered his professional advice on preparedness.

“Being detail-oriented is something that is vital in all walks of business and in life, but if you move too slowly then you’re really not ever going to get anything done, so finding the right pace, I think that’s vital,” Nelson said.

“You want your tempo to be fast-paced, but you don’t want to leave people behind and you want to make sure that you don’t make careless mistakes.”

In addition to the required online courses on campus, high school students may also attend classes at the university level.

“Some students do ASU [Arkansas State University] classes,” Pangburn High School student Brendan Wolfe said. “It’s kind of optional if you want to take ASU classes, that’s an option

for you if you have a high enough ACT or Accuplacer score, and there’s also concurrent credit that you can do here at the school from teachers here [at Pangburn High School].

“I’m in Composition 1 and I’ll be taking Composition 2 next semester, which is basically college freshman English.”

Pangburn students say that they enjoy the program and find that it is helping them already.

“I recently got a job and I was able to use some of the specific terminology that **Peak Performance U** uses, like ‘timeliness,’ ‘dependability’ and words like that in my interview and that helped me get a job,” Pangburn student Danielle Marsh said.

“I went to go work with my aunt and I was just following her around, like job shadowing,” Pangburn student

Summer Rains said. “It [**Peak Performance U**] helped me to learn to be on time and how to work with her and the lessons really helped me.”

Rolland said listening to those involved in human resources and industry allowed for an understanding “about what they were needing, and we developed a course around this.”

“This is our second year in the program,” he said. “We just saw that everywhere we went, people were basically expressing the same opinion on what they needed their workers or college students to be.”

It’s not difficult for other interested school districts to enroll in **Peak Performance U**, according to Rolland, nor is it costly.

“I think it’s around \$200, so it’s very inexpensive and you can enroll all of your students,” he said.

For more information about Peak Performance U—9 Essential Skills for the Workplace, please visit www.paulvitale.com or call 501.626.2630.