



Jeffco Schools teaching beyond the book

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Jefferson County teachers listen to a presentation about LifeSkills Training last week in at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds in Golden. The district has trained more than 170 teachers in the LifeSkills program.

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Effective living is a growing part of the Jeffco Schools curriculum, and this year, thousands of Jeffco Public Schools students will learn about values, choices and their impact.

The LifeSkills Training curriculum was introduced in the spring of 2008, and included

285 students. In the 2008-09 school year, the program grew to 1,075 students, and a goal was set for 1,500 students for 2009-10, according to Mary Blair, district LikeSkills coordinator.

Instead, 5,000 students are now involved in the LST curriculum, far exceeding that goal.

Blair noted the increase reflects the dynamic teachers and counselors spreading the word about the program and encouraging other teachers to train in and teach the curriculum in their classes.

The program centers on three core areas incorporated into the academic curriculum, Blair said.

"Making good choices, minimizing risky behaviors and managing their social choices in a positive way," she said.

Jeffco Schools was awarded a grant through Jefferson County Human Services to train additional staff, staff support, purchase curriculum and hire a coordinator.

The schools work with a subcommittee of the Criminal Justice Department to support the curriculum with the goal of reducing future criminal behavior, risky behavior and increasing graduation rates.

Blair, who retired last year from teaching family and consumer studies, was asked to head the program after a county grant came through.

She said the Rocky Mountain Center for Health Promotion and Education is instrumental in training trainers and social workers who Jeffco staff in teaching the LST programs and she hopes for future grants to continue the training.

There is also a parent component to the curriculum, Blair said, with social workers from Jefferson County Mental Health teaching the skills to parents.

Sharon Murray, RMC president and CEO, said the training could help schools meet the new Colorado standards for health education.

"It takes it from just health information to giving students the critical thinking skills to practice good health-enhancing behavior," she said.

For students, it trains having to stop and think about choices that can affect their lives before making them: reacting to peer pressure to take alcohol and drugs, for instance.

More students are now exposed to the program, Blair said, and a major emphasis is practicing what they're learning so it becomes second nature, Blair said.

"It's been in consumer and family and consumer studies, but not all kids take those

classes unfortunately, so this is a good way to not only support that curriculum, but to get it out to more kids," she said.

The key is students' relationship with their teacher, according to Blair.

"They're willing to take more risks in the classroom to learn some of this behavior and share some of their own personal experiences," she said.

How to measure the program's success is still down the road, but an improvement in graduation rates, student suspension rates and behavioral problems is the hope.

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