

CITY EDUCATORS SHARE CHALLENGES AT SUMMIT

HCPS A Model For Va. Divisions Dealing With ESL, Diversity, Nutrition

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HARRISONBURG — While nutrition, English language learning and parental involvement are not issues unique to Harrisonburg City Public Schools, the division had a chance to share its experiences this week.

HCPS administrators delivered a presentation Thursday in Richmond at the “Practices of Promise for Schools in Challenging Environments” summit, which Superintendent Scott Kizner called a sign of his division’s expertise.

“I think we’re being recognized because we do well in those areas but what we’ll gain is what other school divisions are doing in those areas,” Kizner said.

Hosted by the Virginia School Board

Association and the Virginia Association for School Superintendents, the summit was designed to highlight school divisions with significant challenges, including poverty, state and federal accreditations and equal access to resources for all students.

Highlighting Harrisonburg’s nutrition programs, division Executive Director Andrea Early addressed educators about her office’s Farm to School initiative, in-class dietary information and expanded breakfast options at Harrisonburg High School.

“One of the ongoing challenges with kids is getting them not only to identify healthy choices but also to try them,” she said.

For this reason, HHS teachers now have special snack times in class with fruits and vegetables, and the high school gives students to-go breakfast options between the first two class blocks.

Harrisonburg’s participation in free and reduced lunch programs was about 71 percent in the



Harrisonburg High School students make yogurt parfaits at the Streaks Cafe during lunch Thursday at the school. Harrisonburg City Public Schools’ nutrition director, Andrea Early, went to Richmond with other administrators for a summit for school divisions dealing with tough challenges, including nutrition. (Photo by Jason Lenhart / DN-R)

2013-14 school year, and Early said poor nutritional access could be an obstacle to academic achievement.

Outside school, April Howard, division coordinator of psychological and student services, directs parental outreach programs. Howard spoke at the summit about the Olweus Bullying Prevention program, as well as the partnership with James Madison University's Counseling and Psychological Services Clinic to involve families in students' emotional development.

"The big thing for us is working ... with mental health groups," Howard said of the division's outreach.

While she normally works with Laura Feichtinger McGrath, the division's coordinator for English as a second language programs, the two made separate presentations during the summit.

Feichtinger McGrath explained to attendees how the division's programs for English language learners are integrated into the greater curriculum, rather than added to regular classes. She said the program's history, stretching back to 1993, would be informative to other school divisions that she believes resemble "what Harrisonburg looked like ten years ago."

"I'm lucky," she said. "Everyone at our central office thinks about language learners."

Budgeting for instructional priorities was something Kizner spoke about in his own presentation on the division's "equity audit" of special programs for students.

"We talk a lot in our school division about STEM education and the fine arts academy [at Harrisonburg High School] ... those programs should have students of every background participating," he said.

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