

Children's Foundation supports Leader in Me program

By Mary Anne Brush on July 31, 2019



Photo by Renee Landuyt

Monteith Elementary School is the recipient of a \$19,660 award from the Children's Foundation. The Grosse Pointe Foundation for Public Education wrote the grant proposal to support its ongoing Leader in Me fundraising campaign.

The Grosse Pointe Foundation for Public Education set a target date of 2022 for all elementary schools in the Grosse Pointe Public School System to adopt Leader in Me, an integrated approach to building life skills for elementary-age children that prepares them for college, career and life.

With a \$19,660 award from the Children's Foundation designated for Monteith Elementary School, GPFPE has come closer to reaching its goal. Other schools that will launch the program for the 2019-20 school year with funding from the GPFPE are Maire and Richard elementary schools.

The GPFPE has been funding Leader in Me since 2016, raising more than \$225,626 from donors and events. Since that time five elementary schools — Ferry, Defer, Trombly, Mason and Kerby — have benefited, with GPFPE committed to a three-year implementation. Serving as inspiration for the GPFPE to undergo the multiyear rollout was Poupard Elementary School, which received a five-year Leader in Me grant from Panda Express in 2015.

The Children's Foundation selected Monteith for support due to the diversity of its population and number of students considered to be at-risk, according to President and CEO Lawrence J. Burns.

Burns said the foundation, formerly known as the Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation, changed its mission after the Detroit Medical Center along with Children's Hospital and six other hospitals became a for-profit entity in 2011, altering the type of philanthropy the foundation was able to provide.

The Children's Foundation acquired about \$100 million of legacy money and sought to determine a new purpose and relevancy outside its former philanthropic work for the hospitals. Burns came on board two and a half years ago, relocating from Ohio to his hometown of Grosse Pointe, to help lead the effort.

“That new path is as a community foundation for children and families,” Burns said, adding the grant for Monteith falls into the foundation’s focus area of wellness and nutrition and behavioral health.

Leader in Me appealed to the Children’s Foundation because of its use of “educational best practices in designing, developing and implementing a leadership model that will positively impact elementary school students and their families,” according to the award letter.

“Educational research suggests that Emotional Intelligence is a better predictor of academic and life success than IQ,” the letter read. “The Leader in Me is an effort to foster a student population that is competent in problem-solving skills, innovation, initiative, cultural sensitivity, team working skills and communication, while addressing negative trends in school cultures, such as bullying, low student engagement, mental health issues and low staff morale.”

Burns said he visited a town hall last year at Poupard Elementary School.

“It was very cool,” he said. “It fits into what we really want to do. I grew up in Grosse Pointe so if you talk to somebody not familiar with Grosse Pointe, they would think there are no at-risk kids in Grosse Pointe. There are a lot of at-risk kids for many risks. In (Monteith’s) case, I think I read that 24 percent of these kids are considered at risk. The other at-risk is anybody because of the opioid epidemic and mental health. We’re all at risk.

“What was really attractive was to take the young kids, young boys and girls, and support a program that has data history in providing that it can make a difference in their development,” Burns continued. “And that’s exactly what we want to do and so we’re excited about that. We hope that it’s just the beginning of our relationship.”

According to the GPFPE grant proposal, positive outcomes of Leader in Me implemented at other schools include decreased discipline referrals, lower student absence rates, increased teacher satisfaction, greater parent involvement, greater student confidence and more effective conflict resolution.

“When this program was first introduced to the GPFPE, my first question as a former teacher was: is this just one more thing for them?” said Cynthia Sohn, a member of the GPFPE Board of Directors. “What they came forward with is that actually the teachers embrace this and it helps them do their job. It’s not additional work; it’s a foundation that helps them. It’s like the operating system that they need to continue.”