

School offers mentors for younger students

By Gavin Broussard

In the last couple of years, Durant High School has seen the addition of two new programs that help younger students feel more comfortable in a school setting.

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program is organized by Guidance Counselor Mrs. Kristy Badtram and was started in 2022. MVP is dedicated to teaching freshmen about potential dangers in high school and how to avoid them.

Once a month, upperclassmen give a presentation about topics such as bullying, spreading rumors, alcohol, consent, and cyber bullying. Mrs. Badtram believes that this program is having a positive impact on the kids.

“The program sets the stage for how we want the younger kids to behave in the school,” said Mrs. Badtram.

There are 14 students who help with the MVP program: seniors Leah Feuerbach, Grace Paustian, Maliya Berry, Adison Daufeldt, Garrett Pearlman, Tayton Felske, Mariah Alpen, Conner Schwarz, and Lauren Callison; juniors Paige Happ, Colby Gast,

and Kylee Hahn, and sophomores Isla Petersen and Benjamin Feuerbach.

This program allows freshmen to be able to talk to someone they know if they are concerned about something.

“The freshmen get a good idea of who the upperclassmen are,” said Mrs. Badtram. “If something happens, they know they can talk to them.”

The freshman also can help their fellow classmates by participating in the conversation and sharing experiences they’ve had.

“I know that the younger students like to share stories about instances that they have seen and that helps them,” said Mrs. Badtram.

While MVP is aimed at freshmen, another program is geared towards helping elementary students and started at the beginning of 2024. The Big Buddy program assigns high school students to mentor elementary students. The high schoolers then adapt to the elementary student’s needs, whether it’s extra help or being a friend.

The Big Buddy program is run by

Elementary Guidance Counselor Ms. Kristin Milotte. Some of the key members of the program are seniors Gus Thoma and Josh Peel and freshman Dariyan Skinner.

“They [high school students] might take them [little buddies] to play a board game, or they might go into the gym and play basketball,” said Ms. Milotte. “It kind of just depends on the needs.”

Skinner has had fun experiences with her little buddy.

“One of my favorite experiences with the program is that when I was in the school play, I got to show my little buddy around and all the fun things we do for the play, and she basically got to see the behind-the-scenes of it,” said Skinner.

The little buddies are always appreciative of their big buddies, according to Ms. Milotte.

“Our kids loved it, and they were always looking forward to their big buddy coming,” said Ms. Milotte.

“They were super proud of their big buddies, and they were really excited to show them off to their friends.”

She said the program has made the elementary students more active in school and made them want to be in school.

“Our kids do struggle sometimes to get to school, attendance wise,” said Ms. Milotte. “They’d be like, oh, ‘I’m going to meet with my big buddy today,’ so they want to make it a point to get there.”

Skinner also believes that this program is helping the little buddies.

“I think that the program affects the little buddies in such a positive way because they are getting the opportunity to meet and talk to someone who is older than them and having fun one-on-one time getting to know each other during the school day,” said Skinner.

Ms. Milotte is happy with the results of the program and hopes that it will continue to succeed in the future with the continuous help of high school students.

“I’d love to keep it going because I think it’s been super successful so far,” said Ms. Milotte.

“I’m hoping to have even more people this year, so we’ll see what happens.”

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“I think basketball is probably the choice because it’s in the winter, not as many other things to do,” said Mr. Brittain.

“In basketball you’d probably referee 20 [games], so it’s a little more lucrative for a person that wants to make a few bucks.”

The different sports also attract more officials based on pay too. Generally, the school sets the amount that it can pay, but it is dependent on the level.

“I would say a varsity football official on a Friday night is probably going to get paid between \$125 and \$150 for the game,” said Mr. Curtis.

Football provides the most cash with basketball and baseball following close behind.

“I say that person [basketball official] probably gets paid somewhere around

\$100, \$115 for two games. A baseball umpire probably gets a similar amount,” said Mr. Curtis.

School size also plays a part in where officials decide to referee. Larger schools are able to pay their referees more money; however, those schools still have a problem stocking up on refs.

“There are a lot of officials who would prefer to not go do a Valley vs. Dowling game or a Waukee at Ankeny game,” said Mr. Curtis. “They would prefer to work the Durant vs. Wapello game because of some of the pressure that maybe comes along with [games featuring larger schools].”

The time it takes officials to travel to games is also a factor, according to Mr. Curtis.

“You’re talking about a four- or five-hour evening of work added onto a day that you might have already had an eight-hour day of work,” said Mr. Curtis.

The average age of current referees is somewhere in the fifties, according to Mr. Curtis.

Most of the officials in the state of Iowa are strongly considering retiring in the next five to ten years, so efforts need to be made to bring in younger officials

“One of the main reasons I think people don’t officiate is because they don’t realize that they should or could,” said Mr. Curtis.

Mr. Brittain found officiating when he was in college. He was really just in it for the money at the time, but after a year or two, he became hooked and continued for

the next 45 years.

“The reason I found it on my own was because at the University of Northern Iowa, there was an officiating class that you could take for credit,” said Mr. Brittain. “Those aren’t offered anymore.”

He believes that bringing back those ref classes would really help boost the number of students who register to be refs through the IHSAA and the IGHSAU, which is not a difficult task, according to Mr. Curtis. There are simple steps to be followed.

“You create an account, a simple free account, and then in there you select sports you would be interested in, and you pay a registration fee,” said Mr. Curtis.

For adults, the fee is \$50. For teens and college students, the fee goes down to \$20. If a person wants to register to be an official for multiple sports, each additional sport will cost \$12. The registration needs to be renewed annually.

Mr. Steve Kilker, father of senior football player Cohen Kilker, has been a referee for a number of years.

He officiates games around the area at schools like Bettendorf, Pleasant Valley, North Scott, Muscatine, Clinton, Walcott, and Durant. He also refs youth tournaments.

Mr. Kilker typically works 15 to 20 school football games each season and adds on about 35 school basketball games after that.

In 2022, a letter from the IHSAA was sent out to coaches, parents, and fans stating harassment of referees is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated any



A ref watches from the sidelines at the home football game against Wapello.

longer.

Sadly, according to Mr. Kilker, the letter hasn’t done much.

As a referee, he has witnessed harassment first hand.

“There is quite a bit of it from players and fans, unfortunately coaches as well,” he said. “This has led to a huge reduction in game officials as most new referees get scared off by this.”

However, he noted, “There are still plenty of nice coaches and fans out there.”

Mr. Curtis believes that there isn’t much officials can do about harassment except for calling the game as they see it, but he urged fans to do the right thing.

“Do you as fans have the courage or backbone to stand up to somebody that’s next to you that’s doing something that you think is wrong?” he asked.

“Because I ultimately think the solution to poor sportsmanship from spectators has to come from within the spectators.”

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Arty's Ice Cream and Grill's boys' basketball player of the month

Senior Dylan Arenholz has been playing basketball since he was 5 years old. He got into the sport because his dad made him play when he was younger. What Arenholz enjoys most about playing basketball is it keeps him active during the winter. One of his favorite memories from last season is playing varsity.

Arenholz

Apex Ink and Apparel's junior high athlete of the month

Eighth grader Kolton Frantz has been wrestling for four years. What Frantz enjoys most about the sport is winning his matches. His goal this season is to improve his wrestling skills. One of his favorite memories from last year's season was getting his first tech fall.

Frantz

Raynor Door's wrestler of the month

Junior Ava Streeter has been wrestling for three years. She got into the sport because one of her friends convinced her to join. What Streeter enjoys most about the sport is winning a match. Streeter's favorite memory from last season was qualifying for state and wrestling at the Xtream Arena. Her goal this season is to reach the podium at state.

Streeter

Peel's Inc. girls' basketball player of the month

Junior Paige Happ has been playing basketball since the first grade and got into the sport after watching her sisters play and wanting to try it herself. What she enjoys most about the sport is how competitive the games are. Happ's goal this season is to lead her team as point guard.

Happ