



GROSSMONT UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S NEWSLETTER

From the office of Superintendent Robert Collins

Learning From Schools **Lessons on Intervention from Granite Hills**

As Superintendent, I'm fully aware that the experts are among us. Those experts are our administrators, staff, teachers and often our students. This point was made very clear on my visit to Granite Hills High School last week. Georgette Torres, principal at Granite Hills has been at the school for 29 years, beginning as a teacher. Her passion, enthusiasm and energy are all indicative of the success at the school. While during the next months I will revisit what I learned at Granite Hills, I want to be able to focus on several areas that address students "at-risk." I have recently discussed the need to provide options to students who are not finding success within the regular school program. Granite Hills has done just that.

9th Grade – A Critical Transition

The 9th Grade is a critical time for students. It is a period of adjustment to a rigorous high school environment. The reading and writing assignments, homework and coursework are often a major shift for incoming 9th graders. There is also an issue of maturity, and adjusting to a very different social environment that many students find challenging, if not overwhelming. The majority of students who drop-out of school in the 9th grade, are unable to make these adjustments.

We need to be sure that any strategic plan addresses the transition of students from 8th grade to 9th grade and at the same time, supports students and their families throughout their 9th grade experience.

Making Relationships Count in the 9th Grade at Granite Hills

Granite Hills has clearly recognized these challenges and has implemented programs to address the special needs of 9th graders. For example, every 9th grader is required to participate in a club or sport. Clubs and sports provide an important connection for students to the school and each builds relationships with both adults and other students.

Eagle Link – A Unique Intervention Program

Eagle Link is a freshman mentoring program in which junior and senior Eagle Link leaders are trained to mentor incoming freshmen who have not been successful. Early identification – within the first three weeks of school – has been critical in connecting the Eagle Link leaders with these freshmen. What's also important is to capture these students before they get too far down the road in terms of failure. Too far down the road can be five or six weeks.

Eagle Link leaders host a **pre-school welcoming workshop** and other **social events** as well as **tutorials** and **forums** for struggling freshmen. Eagle Link leaders also present **workshops on alcohol abuse**, and other topics important to freshmen and in particular those "at-risk."

I met the teacher leaders of this program, and their commitment, expertise and dedication was evident. In subsequent visits to other high schools, I have seen similar successful programs. Knowing the importance of relationships in high school and the need to provide those connections for students and the need to intervene early, the question I will ask in each of my school visits is "what are the best programs and how do we make these programs systemic and not isolated by individual schools?"

Again, my visit to Granite Hills makes it clear that the experts are among us if we take the time to listen and learn from each other.