

Press Release

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Van Devender Middle School Achieves Program Success *Local principal receives honorarium for innovative gender-equity program*

Parkersburg, W.Va. – A local principal has received multiple awards from The Education Alliance for his commitment to ensuring both male and female students achieve at or above state averages. Steve Taylor, principal at Van Devender Middle School, created a comprehensive gender-equity initiative to make sure all students achieve at levels that are not only comparable to, but also well above state averages. The effort was made possible through generous support from The Education Alliance's Student Educational and Economic Development Success (SEEDS) program. In addition, The Education Alliance recognized Van Devender as a SEEDS School of the Year and awarded Taylor with an honorarium for his commitment to innovation and success.

SEEDS is an exclusive professional development experience for public school principals in West Virginia that links them with a seasoned business CEO and professional educational consultants. Together, they develop and execute a business plan that targets key challenges at their schools. The benefits of SEEDS include enhanced principal leadership skills, increased student achievement and community involvement, and improvements in facilities and management processes. Jim Strader served as Taylor's educational consultant and worked diligently to support the program.

Gender equity, or single-sex education as it is also called, operates from the premise that boys and girls learn differently. Also, when in co-ed classrooms, research has shown that boys and girls often fall into "stereotypical roles" that can inhibit learning. Recognizing this trend in his own school, Taylor aggressively pursued solutions.

He and his teachers approached their efforts methodically. They understood the need to build capacity at their school, at its feeder schools and throughout the community. They also developed a well-researched approach for all related activities. They implemented single-gender, sixth-grade classrooms in which core classes (math, science, English and social studies) were all male or all female. Faculty also made changes in traditional teaching strategies that resonated with their students.

"Successful change in any organization requires a leader to take an idea from a vision to reality," said Strader. "Mr. Taylor's efforts in leading the successful SEEDS project in gender diversity for Van Devender can serve as a model for others to follow," he explained.

The principal believes that The Education Alliance has opened doors for Van Devender that previously were not available. "SEEDS has given us the opportunity to examine the way we currently teach our students, and it has also allowed us to offer added strategies in order to provide the best education possible to all our students," Taylor said.

The Education Alliance's president/CEO Dr. Patricia Kusimo believes that Taylor's work and success will help other schools around the state. "Many schools and districts are struggling with gender equity. Fortunately, Van Devender has developed a strong program to address the issue," she said. "Other educators can definitely learn from Mr. Taylor's experience," Dr. Kusimo said.

Van Devender Middle received \$50,000 from The Education Alliance during the past two years to help meet its SEEDS goals and objectives. Over the next two school years, Van Devender plans to phase-in the gender-based instructional approach at the seventh and eighth grade levels.

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