

# Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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## Link Crews connect freshmen to high schools

Freshmen at Woodstock and Woodstock North high schools will be greeted on Day One by friendly upperclassmen there to guide and support them all school year.

Link Crew is a new freshmen transition program being implemented this school year on the Blue Streaks and Thunder campuses.

"Its primary goal is to create a welcoming first experience for incoming freshmen during orientation, as well as to build in academic and social support throughout the school year. This hopefully sets them up for a successful four years," said Jennifer Spear, assistant principal at Woodstock North High School.

About 50 students at each school who've demonstrated leadership potential were identified last spring. School administrators tried to select students with a wide variety of interests, personality types and demographic characteristics. Link Crews contain athletes, fine arts students, academic stars among others including some who are a mix of many things.

The students participated in extensive training the week before the first day of school with exercises and games designed to help freshmen open up about their hopes and dreams for their high school experiences.

John Liuzzi, assistant principal at Woodstock High School, said the Link Crew curriculum, designed by the Boomerang Project, is structured to ease the high school transition, which can be a stressful time for adolescents.

Link Crew members work to get students connected with their activities, organizations and classes at their high schools. While the incoming freshmen benefit, the side benefits are an overall better high school culture and tangible leadership experience that Link Crew members can use on their college applications.

Freshmen will first meet their Link Crew team leaders at orientation sessions on Aug. 15. They'll be greeted with upbeat music, games and activities to demonstrate the welcoming environment.

But Link Crew relationships don't stop with orientation. Teams of two Link Crew leaders are assigned to 10 freshmen whom the leaders will check up on throughout the school year. They can expect lunchtime drop-ins, invitations to meet at a football game or advice about joining a particular organization, where to get help for a class and other friendly support.

"The goal is to help freshmen feel better connected to school from day one. If our Link Leaders do a good job, our freshmen will be able to look at them, pinpoint one junior or senior, and say, 'That's who I want to be like when I am a junior or senior,'" Spear said.