From Participants to Leaders: Cultivating Belonging at HHS

Board of Education Meeting
November 5, 2025

Overview & Outcomes

Presenters:

- Kim Beukema, Principal, Harrison High School
- Maria Pace, Assistant Principal, Harrison High School
- Leah Moore (HS Teacher)
- Liz Hill (HS teacher) - Friends of Rachel Advisor
- Deborah DiFiore & Anna Abalyan (HS Teachers) - Youth Volunteers of Harrison (YVH) Advisors
- HHS Students: [YVH] Cayla Ende & Gabriella Collins
- HHS Students: [Friends of Rachel] Eva Popescu, Jamie Reyes, Maddie Reynolds

Nothing in Harrison Happens by Accident

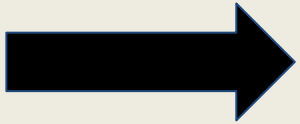
... vision without systems thinking ends up painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*

- Culture is built in the moments we choose to create.
- In Harrison, belonging is not incidental — it is intentional.
- We design the conditions that shape how students experience community.

Nothing in Harrison happens by accident; culture is built in the moments we <u>choose</u> to create.

Student Agency:

- Student Choice
- Student Voice
- Student Ownership



Requires a culture where students are <u>Seen</u>, <u>Heard</u>, and <u>Valued</u>

What our high school looks like, sounds like, & feels like should belong to all of us.

Where The Work Began

- Shift started with inquiry into value and purpose of student clubs.
- Two HHS English Teachers & Future School Leaders Academy Members led the model development.
- Their focus was move from participation → to leadership development.

What We Noticed

- Student leadership in clubs was often positional, not developmental.
- Advisors mostly led; students followed.
- Many students did not know how to enter or see themselves connected to these clubs.

The Purpose of the Shift

- Reimagine the role and responsibilities of Club Advisors
- Student-led planning with advisor coaching
- De-center the activities of extracurricular, re-center it on student leadership
- Ensure every club is a doorway to belonging.
- Cultivate student leadership to invite other students in.

What This Looks Like in Practice

- Advisors are aligned in purpose and practice.
- Students set agendas and lead communication.
- Students plan projects and reflect on leadership growth.
- Advisors coach, support, and help students build ownership.

OUR COLLECTIVE APPROACH
Creating Systemized Conditions to Build Student Leadership

Shifting Culture

Spring 2023
FSLA Project
Andrew Del Rosso, Leah Moore, Lindsey Reilly design training for coaches & advisors

Activating Advisors

July 2024
Summer Course
Cultivating Community and Student Agency Outside the Classroom

Transfering Leadership

November 2024
Board of Education Presentation
celebrating Girls Varsity Soccer, Marching Band, & HHS Writing Center

Building Capacity

Spring 2025
Study Group
Establishing new systems for mission statements and committees

Collective Impact

Summer 2025
Course Year 2
Establishing new systems for leadership selection, recruitment, & cultivating the dispositions of leaders

In-Service Courses & Study Group



Activated leadership skills of the advisors → cultivate the same in our students

- Shared Mission Statement
- Reframing Leadership Positions
- Additional Committees
- Recruitment & Engagement
- Disposition of a Leader

*To date, more than 50% of our coaches and advisors have participated

Beyond the Classroom: The Deeper Benefits of Extracurricular Participation at HHS

Creating a Sense of Belonging Through Leadership

- Participants gain a stronger sense of purpose and belonging, reducing isolation and strengthening community.
- **Improved attendance.**
  - Participating students have less than half of the average absence rate of non-participating students.
- **Improved academic outcomes.**
  - Lower absence rates have a significant relationship to higher GPA.

Access to Extracurriculars

- Benefits of extracurriculars are consistent regardless of student backgrounds.
  - **HCSD removes barriers to participation for *all* students.**
  - Culture is built deliberately, together.
- Over 90 extracurricular activities
  - Robust offerings appealing to students with various backgrounds, interests, and participation levels.
  - Academic, Athletics, Arts, Service.

Students Leading Inclusive Communities



Friends of Rachel



Youth Volunteers of Harrison

Friends of Rachel
Club Advisor - Liz Hill

A school-based student group fostering a more positive and compassionate school culture by performing acts of kindness and promoting acceptance.

Advisor-Driven

- Handing out Colored Ribbons to spread awareness (Breast Cancer Awareness Month)
- Promoting kindness with notes around school.
- Creating a positivity wall

Advisor manages Google Classroom and sends out notifications

Advisor sets agenda and takes attendance

Student-Driven

- Making Strides Breast Cancer Walk
- Random Acts of Kindness Week
- Flower-grams
- Supporting FASE Program
- Collaborating with Relay for Life and other clubs

- Cabinet members manage Google Classroom
- Cabinet members email administration

Cabinet members brainstorm with members weekly, set the agendas, & take attendance

Youth Volunteers of Harrison (YVH) → Deb DiFiore & Anna Abalyan

Giving back to the Community through volunteer service projects within Harrison High School, the Harrison community and Westchester County.

Out with the Old…

Advisor-Centered

Advisors…

- Created meeting agendas
- Ran meetings
- Researched and decided on service projects
- Created materials, school announcement
- Managed Google Classroom
- Selected club officers

Students…

- Participated in service projects

….In with the Reimagined

Student-Centered

Advisors…

- Set goals, provide feedback & suggestions to club officers and committee members
- Support student initiatives

Students…

- Vote club officers into office
- Create weekly meeting agendas [President]
- Take attendance & minutes [Secretary]
- Oversee club financials [Treasurer]
- Actively take leadership role in a committee based on their interests and goals [ALL]
- Collaborate with committee members to plan & execute initiatives to meet their monthly goal [ALL]

Youth Volunteers of Harrison (YVH) → Deb DiFiore & Anna Abalyan

"Leadership is action, not position." Donald McGannon

Fundraising Committee	Service Committee	Graphic Design Committee	Team Building Committee
Planning & running fundraising activities [raffles, bake sales, etc] **Your Goal for today:** Plan a November fundraising activity. What? When? Check with Ms. Fontana in B123 **Future:** Fundraising at least 1x a month	Planning and organizing in - and out-of school volunteer opportunities **Your Goal for today:** Brainstorm a December volunteer opportunity In? Out? What? Where? **Future:** Two activities a month [1 in, 1 out]	Design club flyers, create & maintain Instagram account **Your Goal for today:** Create YVH Instagram account **Future:** Create flyer for Decicco's Food Drive - need by 10/31	Mentor new members; develop team building activities **Your Goal for today:** Come up with a YVH team building activity for our Nov 6 Meeting **Future:** Team building activity 1x a month

ONE person from the committee should complete the Google Form [summary & next steps] after your break out session.

Students Leading Inclusive Communities



Friends of Rachel



Youth Volunteers of Harrison

The Future

- Our goal is for students to develop leadership that focuses on empathy, purpose, and connection.
- We will continue to design the conditions that make belonging possible.