

Greater Alabama Council

Youth Leadership Development Program

Youth Leadership Development Program (YLDP)

Purpose:

The Youth Leadership Development Program, (YLDP) provides a leadership development program for juniors and seniors in high school chosen for their character rather than academic standing.

The basic tenet of the YLDP is that a person's character is more important than anything else in the ability to lead others and be a true leader.

History:

The Youth Leadership Development Program began in the Fall of 2008. Its purpose is to provide a leadership development program for juniors and seniors in high school chosen to participate because of their character rather than academic standing. The basic tenet of the YLDP is that the character of a person is more important than anything else to being a true leader. The YLDP was launched in September 2008 with seven high school partners, each selecting ten students to represent their high school in the YLDP. In November of that year Lawson State and Jefferson State Community Colleges became the first YLDP College/Operating Partners by providing volunteer leaders to assist in developing and administering the YLDP. Additionally, both Lawson State and Jefferson State provided coordinators (scholarship students) to work as facilitators for student groups and activities. Unprecedentedly, Lawson State President Dr Perry Ward and Jefferson State President Dr Judy Merritt committed two Presidential Scholarships each to the top students of "character" from the YLDP. Colleges had for many, many years provided scholarships to students who had academic achievement and those who had athletic achievement but never before to students who demonstrated the highest of character. These two special leaders, who themselves possessed the highest of character, broke new ground in higher education's goal to develop and provide the leaders of tomorrow for our society.

Wallace State Community College, Hanceville joined the YLDP as an Operating Partner in 2013 under the Leadership of President Vickie Karolewics. This partnership allowed the YLDP to expand to three new counties, providing many more high schools the opportunity to participate in the YLDP. In addition to providing personnel and scholarships, Dr Karolewics immediately brought a renewed energy to the YLDP, generating new ideas and direction to the YLDP.

At this point in time the YLDP had 95 High School Partners that each chose up to four seniors and two juniors to represent their high school, three College-Operating Partners, Lawson State, Wallace State, Jefferson State, and twenty five College Partners, in total providing nearly \$2 million in scholarship opportunities for students of character. In its first 14 years of existence the Youth Leadership Development Program awarded \$10 million in life changing scholarships to students of character.

In 2022–2023 another major expansion took place in North Alabama. Newly appointed President of Calhoun Community College Dr Jimmy Hodges decided that Calhoun would become the YLDP's fourth College Operating Partner. Under the direction of Calhoun Community College Vice President Dr Patricia Wilson this expansion added three counties and 20 new High School Partners, for a total of 115, to the YLDP. Additionally, for 2022–2023 Calhoun Community College and Georgia Highlands College became YLDP College Partners which resulted in 27 College Partners and added another \$50,000 to the already \$2 million in scholarship opportunities exclusively for YLDP students.

The YLDP Experience

The Three Pillars of the YLDP— Faith— Character— Patriotism are the foundations of the YLDP Curriculum, and its instructional process and activities. Hence, the Curriculum is not limited to the monthly lessons and group discussions but is the "experiencing" of the YLDP.

Faith is up front in every meeting and activity as all meetings and activities are opened with a group prayer. These "prayers" provide a direct and reverent acknowledgment of a power higher than ourselves, God. It also allows students to experience community identity with the idea of having and expressing Faith. The January meeting is a

special experience in Faith. This annual experience is held in the sanctuary of the historic 16th Street Baptist Church with Liz Huntley as the speaker. Liz is the author of "More Than A Bird", which is her inspirational life story about how Faith not only saved her life but has guided her throughout her life.

Character is quite obviously the essence of the YLDP. Students know they have been chosen because of their demonstrated character in school. They also realize that if they excel in the YLDP, College Partners offer scholarships to them because of their demonstrated character in the YLDP. Therefore, to experience the YLDP is to come face to face with the meaning of character. To understand that character is not a nebulous term but is in fact how you live your life. The YLDP "experience" presents the true nature of character by introducing the students to the "universal morals", and "essential morals" vital to having sound character. All YLDP lessons, activities, program service projects, and student created service projects are a constant and consistent experiencing of the meaning of character.

Patriotism is part and parcel of the entire experience of the YLDP. The "Pledge of Allegiance", led by a student, is said at the opening of every meeting and performed in the traditional sense by all students. Whenever a YLDP meeting or activity has the capability the "National Anthem" is played and traditional participation and respect is shown.

Patriotism, although a constant stream within the YLDP experience, is most emphasized during the first quarter of the year. At the initial meeting in September, the students are assigned to a "Company" named in honor of one of the YLDP's special Medal of Honor recipients i.e. Thorsness, Adkins, Morris, Livingston, Rose, Donlon, Beikirch. Assignments, lessons, and activities for October are directly related to patriotism, the Medal of Honor, veterans, "Green Berets", and The Command Sergeant Major Bennie Adkins Foundation. The Pillar of Patriotism comes to total fruition in the YLDP in November with the its annual "Walk For Warriors" and the annual YLDP Patriotism Program. Both of which dramatically bring to life the true meaning of Patriotism through student involvement, honored guests, special presentations, and the celebration of freedom, its cost and those who have protected our freedom and continue to do so.

Curriculum and Instruction:

The Three Pillars of the YLDP: Faith, Character, and Patriotism are the foundations of the YLDP Curriculum, and its instructional process and activities. Hence, the Curriculum is not limited to the monthly lessons and group discussions but is the "experiencing" of the YLDP.

Faith is up front in every meeting and activity as all meetings and activities are opened with a group prayer. These "prayers" provide a direct and reverent acknowledgment of a power higher than ourselves, God. It also allows students to experience community identity with the idea of having and expressing Faith.

Character is quite obviously the essence of the YLDP. Students know they have been chosen because of their demonstrated character in school. They also realize that if they excel in the YLDP, College Partners offer scholarships to them because of their demonstrated character in the YLDP. Therefore, to experience the YLDP is to come face to face with the meaning of character. To understand that character is not a nebulous term but is in fact how you live your life. The YLDP "experience" presents the true nature of character by introducing the students to the "universal morals," and "essential morals" vital to having sound character. All YLDP lessons, activities, program service projects, and student created service projects are a constant and consistent experiencing of the meaning of character.

Patriotism is part and parcel of the entire experience of the YLDP. The "Pledge of Allegiance," led by a student, is said at the opening of every meeting and performed in the traditional sense by all students. Whenever a YLDP Meeting or activity has the capability the "National Anthem" is played and traditional participation and respect is shown.

Patriotism, although a constant stream within the YLDP experience, is most emphasized during the first quarter of the year. At the initial meeting in September, the students are assigned to a "Company" named in honor of one of the YLDP's special Medal of Honor recipients i.e. Thorsness, Adkins, Morris, Livingston, Rose, Donlon, Marm, and Beikirch. Assignments, lessons, and activities for October are directly related to patriotism, the Medal of Honor, veterans, "Green Berets," and The Command Sergeant Major Bennie Adkins Foundation. The Pillar of Patriotism comes to total fruition in the YLDP in November with the its annual "Walk For Warriors" and the annual YLDP Patriotism Program. Both of which dramatically bring to life the true meaning of Patriotism through student

involvement, honored guests, special presentations, and the celebration of freedom, its cost and those who protect our freedom.

Description & Process:

The YLDP is designed to assist students chosen for their demonstrated character in developing leadership skills. Because of the large number of YLDP High School Partners involved, the YLDP has great diversity within the student body. The YLDP has diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, religious belief, economic background, and academic achievement. The YLDP is a model of and for tomorrow's America, where diversity is treasured as one of its greatest resources.

The YLDP is a nine-month Program that begins in September and ends in May. It conducts monthly meetings that start at 4:30pm and end no later than 7:30pm.

Typically, students sign in upon arrival. Each monthly meeting has a special guest speaker for approximately 60 minutes, which includes questions and answers. This is followed by a student group lesson focusing on faith, character, and/ or patriotism. Active student participation is a part of each lesson. The student groups are specifically designed to include all aspects of the diversity within the YLDP and are assigned for the entire year. Every meeting concludes with students coming together to discuss group ideas, conclusions, and opinions. Students sign out before leaving.

In addition to monthly meetings, the YLDP operates numerous, staff approved, student created and enacted service projects. YLDP participation projects are also available to students to assist community organizations e.g. The CSM Bennie Adkins Foundation, The American Village, and When students plan a service project, they are encouraged to focus on what morals are being experienced within the project, and also identify any aspect of the Pillars of Faith and/ or Patriotism as a part of the service experience.

A major component of the YLDP is its special relationship with College Partners. These colleges actively support the belief that sound character is vital for leaders to possess. And that by supporting students of character they are helping to fulfill a major goal of higher education, preparing leaders of tomorrow. This support is shown by the scholarships they provide exclusively to the students of the YLDP. A very important component of the YLDP is to encourage students to be informed about at least several different colleges, preferably of different sizes in order to be certain of where they believe they will be most successful, both academically and socially. The YLDP conducts two College Fairs in the first quarter of the year which are only available to YLDP students, parents, and college partners. The YLDP encourages students, and parents to arrange college visits to our YLDP College Partners. Students selected for the YLDP must be legal citizens of the United States. Preference in selection of students chosen for the YLDP must be given to students who are interested in attending one of our college Partners, students who are undecided on the college they want to attend, or students who are interested in attending one of our Military Academies.

The YLDP evaluation process is based on a point system which is given to both students, and parents at Orientation. All YLDP students should understand that future success in the YLDP is entirely in their hands. All students begin equally and are informed that points are earned exclusively by active participation in the YLDP. In March, YLDP qualified students can select up to three colleges, in order of preference, that they want to compete for scholarships to attend. Scholarship recipients are determined by the highest YLDP point totals. Through the experience of the fair and equal competition of the YLDP, final lessons the students learn is the joy found in having and successfully completing responsibility, an understanding of the work ethic needed to successfully compete, and the rewards earned for dedication, determination, and hard work.

Whether students have earned one of the many YLDP scholarships or not, the YLDP provides many valuable and rewarding lessons and experiences that help prepare students for the next phase of their lives.

The YLDP is a special experience for students that assists in heightening their awareness of the beliefs that "this nation will remain free only so long as it is the home of the brave". And an understanding that "the greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of faith, patriotism and character". In essence, the YLDP is an experiencing of what is the rightful "social inheritance" of every American child, to have faith, be given a moral foundation in order to develop good character and have a deep patriotic passion for the United States of America.