

To Those In a Position to Support the Lewiston Leadership Academy,

When I first walked into the Longley gym last spring I didn't know what to expect. My son had asked the afternoon before if I'd take him. The excitement he had to go play soccer with his friends was infectious. A "yes" was easy to deliver.

I found a gym that was awash with activity and energy as the kids warmed up with balls and small-sided games. The games seemed to know no bounds and travel around the gym that day. I lost track of my son and just began to watch and absorb the room. My role as an observer ended rather quickly though when I was asked if I wanted to help. I couldn't say no; the atmosphere was infectious. Within the first 20 minutes I had gone from parent observer to part-time coach and I couldn't be happier for the opportunity.

There was a lot to do during those early sessions: routines to establish, norms to create, boundaries to set, but most importantly relationships to develop. It has been through this process that the Leadership Program has truly emerged. While the soccer has improved in dynamic ways that I could write extensively about, the kids are learning a great deal more. The check-ins, mindful breathing, topics of the week, discussions of leadership, exit topics are molding young men who understand their roles within a group; are willing to pick up their opponent and congratulate others on their successes; can settle arguments through discussion; are accepting of results that don't go their way; and have the self-awareness to not only advocate for themselves, but to do so respectfully.

The growth has been tremendous. I wouldn't have believed that I'd be accompanying a group of those kids to a futsal tournament in Massachusetts only a few months later. The soccer was good and I was so proud to be associated with their efforts that day, but the way they composed themselves during games, but also off the court during our "down time" truly demonstrated the progress that the program is helping these young men to make. As a parent, an educator, a coach, a Lewiston resident I found myself swollen with pride. They played in their first tournament, in a foreign environment (both competitively and geographically) and played a game with quirky rules (many of which were foreign to me and certainly to them) and they succeeded. They were placed in a prolonged high stress situation and both on the court and off rose to the occasion.

Each time I enter the gym or these young leaders out in the community and get a smile and a "Hi Coach!" I'm able to see their growth. I've seen it in the ability to make eye contact and speak up confidently. In others it is the ability to stay calm in a situation that was frustrating in the past. There are a number that had trouble taking even positive feedback before. The number of successes easily exceeds the number of athletes that attend each session.

I count myself lucky to be involved in such an inspiring program; find myself grateful such a thing exists for the youth of Lewiston; and envious that such a thing didn't exist for me in my youth.

I hope that the Lewiston Leadership Academy will be recognized and supported for all the good it is offering the youth of Lewiston.

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