

## JR/SR High students participate in emotional Challenge Day

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Holyoke JR/SR High School students and staff participated in Challenge Day Wednesday-Thursday, Sept. 5-6.

Challenge Day is an international non-for-profit organization whose vision is “that every child lives in a world where they feel safe, loved and celebrated.”

At the beginning of the day students and adults opened with ice-breakers and interactive interpersonal lessons primarily focusing on dancing. Dancing was the first of many tools the Challenge Day leaders used to lure participants out of their “box” or comfort zone and to express more of themselves.

Soon after the dancing, students and staff were able to get better acquainted with each other by breaking into smaller groups which the leaders called “small families.” These small families were the support system for each group member throughout the day. Within each small family, members were able to express their emotions and to share stories about themselves that other group members might not have known.



**Students in Holyoke JR/SR High participated in Challenge Day Sept. 5-6. The emotional day urges**

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**students to open up and connect with each other to make the school a better and more inviting place.**

Students and staff were challenged throughout the day to change themselves in order to change the world, to express themselves and to cross physical, emotional and social boundaries. The presenters explained that each individual is like an iceberg, the visible 10 percent of the individual is their image.

The remaining 90 percent is what individuals try to shelter from the outside world. The challenge for each student and staff member was to drop their waterline and fully express 100 percent of themselves to their peers, teachers and coaches.

By the end of the day participants were able to express how they would be the change in the school by sharing personal struggles and breaking down personal boundaries.

The following are some of the ways that the students and teachers expressed their experiences by dropping their waterline at Challenge Day.

Students and staff shared how they will continue to be the change they want to see in their school by breaking down personal boundaries and sharing personal struggles. Students promised to treat everyone equally and by stepping up to take leadership roles within the school and the community.

Other students shared a desire to deepen and expand their friendships within the school. Staff members valued a need to support all students and to help students be proud of their accomplishments.

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Students continued to drop their waterline while connecting to their peers and sharing stories, some of which included things such as trust, friendship, expectations, home life and school related issues.

Teachers found equal benefits because they were able to see students beyond the everyday teacher/student relationship to a more personal level.

So many people were able to reach through their comfort zone and expand their personal bubble to allow room to cross lines that normally would have been barriers never to be touched. Students shared information about past experiences, personal struggles, personal triumphs and future goals with other students and staff who were mere acquaintances only hours before.

One of the most amazing realizations for both students and staff was that each individual has such amazing strength and courage which has helped each participant persevere through the most difficult struggles.

The impact of Challenge Day at Holyoke JR/SR High will last much longer than these few days after participating in the one-day event. Students and staff will strive to commit themselves to the challenge of making the school much more than just a place to come every day to learn but to make the school much more like a community where students and staff alike feel safe, protected and cared for each day.

*Editor's note: Students in Angela Powell's AP Composition class contributed to this article.*

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