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TOP STORY

Education commissioner urges local students to chase success

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Jun 29, 2018



Interim education commissioner Wayne Lewis (right) talks with Brevon Whitney Friday, June 29, 2018, and other Western Kentucky University Young Male Leadership Academy students during an end-of-year celebration at Downing Student Union. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Local high school students in Western Kentucky University's Young Male Leadership Academy had a special guest Friday.

Wayne Lewis, the state's interim education commissioner, gave the keynote address at the program's year-end awards celebration at Downing Student Union. In his remarks, Lewis encouraged students to believe in themselves, have a vision of success and start living that vision now.

"Right now, you have to start being the very young men that you want to be in a few years," Lewis said.

As a college preparation and recruitment initiative, the Young Male Leadership Academy works with young males from diverse backgrounds to develop leadership skills and explore the teaching profession, a news release said.

This year's academy drew 16 participants from area high schools. During the academic year, students take field trips, meet local professionals and hone their public speaking, interview and college readiness skills.

The academy also features a summer program that allows students to learn about and prepare for careers in education, a news release said.

Emerson Pocasangre, a junior at Bowling Green High School, described the experience as life-changing. The academy has taught him leadership and communication skills and responsibility.

"It just makes you a better person," he said.

Pocasangre also said his teachers at Bowling Green High School have helped push him. He said he's considering becoming a physical education teacher and coach, but also has an interest in counseling.

He credited LEAD Academy Principal Robert Lightning and English teacher Philip Russell for inspiring him to consider teaching as a career.

“We have people that want to help us but just have to put ourselves out there,” Pocasangre said.

With his remarks, Lewis aimed to help lift students up. He started by encouraging program participants, many of them young men of color, to believe in themselves.

A few of the students told Lewis they wanted to be counselors or therapists, for example.

“You guys live in a society where people continue to tell you, and images continue to say to you, that you can’t be who you’re telling me you want to be,” he said. “People will continue to doubt you ... You have to believe that you can be successful beyond a shadow of a doubt.”



Next, Lewis urged students to vividly imagine themselves living their dream job.

He encouraged developing “the ability to see that which is not in front of your face.”

Finally, Lewis told students to start living that dream in their current lives. By acting out their dreams, he said, students can grow into them.

“When did LeBron (James) start being LeBron,” Lewis said, citing the basketball player. “He didn’t get those things after he got drafted. He didn’t start working hard after he got his first check in the NBA. I think LeBron believed the whole time ... that he had the ability to do what he’s doing now.”

Tony Whitney is a father with three sons who have gone through the program. He said he’s seen his sons Dalton, Braxton and Brevon grow in confidence and be more outspoken.

“It’s gotten better and better every year,” he said of the program.

Memphas Hite, a junior at Warren East High School, said the program taught him to stand out.

“It pushed me out of my comfort zone to meet new people,” he said. “Show them that you’re a somebody.”

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