

BE GREAT: GRADUATE

Boys & Girls Clubs receives Walmart Grant

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The Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands has funding for a new program targeting middle-school students.

The organization received a \$30,000 grant from the Walmart Foundation last week for their "Be Great: Graduate" program.

The program, spearheaded by program services director Mark Davis, encourages 13-year-olds to stay in school.

"It's going to help us focus on the issue of high school dropouts," said Boys & Girls Clubs CEO P.T. McEwen. "That freshman year, there are a lot of kids who don't make it - it's a big jump from middle school to high school it's a tough transition and a lot of kids you'll see in their GPAs suffer from that."

McEwen said the grant will fund the first year of the five-year program; they are seeking funding from other organizations and corporations for the next four years.

"So (the Walmart grant) will help us get started," he said.

"Be Great: Graduate" will begin in fall, McEwen said. The program encourages higher education and vocational opportunities through mentoring.

The grant will fund staffing, program supplies, expenses related to college field trips and guest speakers, according to Walmart.

"I know how hard the transition to ninth grade is," said Clement Middle School principal Robert Clarey, who worked at Redlands and Redlands East Valley high schools before going to Clement.

"If they have a program that helps transition kids from eighth to ninth grade, they're going hand in hand with everything the district's trying to do," he said.



Alejandra Reyes, 14, left, Cody Finley, 14, and Kamryn Coleson, 13, study at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands. (JOY JUEDES/Redlands Daily Facts)

The clubs put up fliers at the school, and the school puts information about the clubs in its bulletin, he said.

"I hear kids talk about it," he said.

Students may be more receptive to the Boys & Girls Clubs program because it's not school, he said.

Often, students who are struggling with academics simply avoid them, McEwen said.

The program will build learning skills and offer individual mentoring, paid internships, incentives, workshops and university field trips, according to Walmart.

McEwen said as many as one in three students fall through the cracks between middle school and high school, and the number is as high as 50 percent for minorities.

"There's just that need," he said. "I think if we had one kid determined not to drop out, it would be money well spent."

Sue Buster, director of curriculum and instruction for the Redlands Unified School District, said the program shows great vision.

"Dropout prevention and promoting kids going to college, that's huge on our minds right now," she said. "Anything to keep our students engaged."

The school district does many activities with community groups, so the grant directly benefits the district, she said.

Walmart Foundation spokeswoman Amelia Neufeld said the grant is the foundation's first to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands.

"We make the majority of charitable donations at the local level," she said.

Organizations can apply through the Foundation and at individual stores, which have a certain amount of Foundation money, she said.

She said Walmart was glad to support an educational program like "Be Great: Graduate."

The Walmart Foundation's California State Giving Council gave the grant to the clubs "due to its unique focus on youth living in a cycle of poverty and providing them job and college preparation opportunities," according to Walmart.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands serve Redlands, Loma Linda, Mentone and San Bernardino.

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