



Update

Spring 2009 Published by Community for Education Foundation

Kansas City, Missouri Incorporates Overcoming Obstacles into District-Wide Program

Overcoming Obstacles™ Life Skills Program has been the sole source of life skills curricula for a district-wide middle and high school advisory program in Kansas City, Missouri since 2007.

Selected by Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD) and the Partnership for Regional Educational Preparation (PREP-KC), a unique collaboration that brings district resources and PREP-KC private resources together to increase college-going and access to high-quality employment for low-income students served by KCMSD, the Overcoming Obstacles program is now part of their Family Advocacy advisory initiative. To date, there are 400 sets of our life skills curriculum in KCMSD classrooms!

The Family Advocacy initiative creates a bridge between teachers, students, and students' families through advisory programs. Each school staff member works as an advocate for the same 15-17 students for the entire time they are in the school. The advisory program groups meet weekly to promote students' social development, academic achievement, and positive involvement within the school and surrounding communities.

Teacher advocates help students achieve their academic goals and provide families consistent communication with school staff members who know their child well.

PREP-KC regularly evaluates the effectiveness of their initiatives that emphasize small learning communities, advisory programs, and academic rigor, and have found that these elements improve academic outcomes, increase graduation rates, and prepare students for college and careers.



Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program for middle schools and high schools helps educators equip students with communication, decision making, goal setting skills and much more.

Middle School 534–Brooklyn Uses Overcoming Obstacles for Special Education

Principal Will Cooper already had a successful advisory curriculum using the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program at MS 534. So, when he needed an advisory curriculum to meet the needs of the school's 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Special Education classes, he knew Overcoming Obstacles would be up to the challenge of creating another effective program for his students.

MS 534 requested its first advisory program to help merge two schools' cultures and define their new identity. School environment, team building, civics, good citizenry, and service learning were selected as the curriculum's focus. Students completed service learning projects, which included a voter registration drive and a letter writing campaign to civic leaders regarding community problems.



This colorful graphic is displayed on MS 534's website. It depicts the blending of two school cultures into a new identity which Overcoming Obstacles' advisory program helped to achieve.

The flexibility of Overcoming Obstacles' activity-based lessons allowed the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum team to design the Special Education advisory program to engage the students and make life skills instruction relevant to their needs. In addition to Overcoming Obstacles' hallmark focus on communication, decision making, and goal setting skills, this new curriculum concentrates on building confidence, teaching stress management and developing organizational skills.

Transitional Housing Students Learn Solid Life Skills

In 2007, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development requested that Overcoming Obstacles customize its standard curriculum to help students in temporary housing better cope with transition. We adapted our standard Overcoming Obstacles program to address the unique needs of these students and help create a sense of belonging, as well as developed and incorporated a special student workbook to help them chronicle their experiences.

Recently, Wayne Harris, a content expert for students in transitional housing in New York City, spoke with Overcoming Obstacles about this program and its many benefits. Most notably, Mr. Harris remarked that the lessons easily adapt to fit each facilitator's skill level, make the facilitator's job easier because the material is student-centered, and fit the individual learning style of each student.

We have witnessed firsthand how skills taught in the Overcoming Obstacles program help transitional housing students rise above their circumstances, set and achieve meaningful goals, and create better lives for themselves. Mary Wright and Shaquana Andrews, two young women in the New York City transitional housing program, have recently earned recognition as Overcoming Obstacles

student Achievement Award honorees and received scholarships to help them pursue higher education.

Overcoming Obstacles can help any education program that needs life skills support for its transitional housing students. Funding for the education of homeless persons and youth under the McKinney-Vento Act can help schools implement programs like ours.

STRENGTH SQUARES				
Is good at math	Always works hard	Likes to join in things	Can organize anything	Can use a computer
Speaks more than one language	Tells great stories and jokes	Is a good speller	Plays a team sport	Likes to read
Knows how to swim	Can play a musical instrument	FREE SPACE	Has a good memory	Is good at building or making things
Likes to make charts and graphs	Likes to figure out how things work	Likes to write	Likes to be in plays	Likes to help others
Is a good cook	Keeps a personal diary or journal	Likes to design posters and murals	Is a good artist	Is a great dancer

Activity-based lessons like STRENGTH SQUARES help students identify their own strengths, build confidence, and recognize others' talents. With over 600 lessons, the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum ensures that young people learn the skills they need to be successful in life.

What's New at Overcoming Obstacles?

This year was off to a fast start at Overcoming Obstacles. Mailings to educators, an updated website design and strengthened online presence, and new curriculum offerings are all helping Overcoming Obstacles increase program awareness and expand across the country.



Visit our new website at www.overcomingobstacles.org

In February, a newly designed Overcoming Obstacles website was launched featuring updated graphics, a tour of the life skills program, online ordering capability, and an educators' online membership community. The new website has already generated numerous inquiries, orders from new schools, and educator community member enrollment. Overcoming Obstacles' Facebook page serves as our online community space and allows the staff quickly and easily to update educators on new curriculum offerings and exciting program developments. Teachers can download new lessons, read more about our program, and post updates on how students are using life skills in their schools.

Beginning in April, Overcoming Obstacles will offer three new modules – Service Learning, Buddy Mentoring and Bullying – and a complimentary “Lesson of the Month” designed to supplement original curricula and address vital topics such as cyber bullying and environmental issues. The first “Lesson of the Month” is *PASS IT ON*, a teamwork skills lesson. All interested teachers will be able to download the lesson from our website and Facebook page for use in their classrooms.

Our Mission: To ensure that all young people learn the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life.



Overcoming Obstacles

125 Maiden Lane, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10038

T: 212-406-7488 F: 212-406-7480 Toll Free: 877-840-9606

www.overcomingobstacles.org

© 2009