

Students with academic challenges are successful thanks to the Edge program

América Barceló Feldman / FOR THE SUN OF YAKIMA Apr 26, 2018



The facilitator of the Edge Foundation program and English teacher, Sue de Bord-Sanders, talks with Luz Castro at Eisenhower High School on April 23, 2018. Shawn Gust / Yakima's Sun

Students with difficulties to reach their potential in school, at risk of losing the year and even not graduating from high school, because they are labeled as "problematic" or "unattainable", have new hope.

The Edge Foundation, a program to help young people develop their maximum capacity, offers weekly sessions with a professional instructor who guides them to make the right decisions, achieve academic success and live a full life.

Edge serves students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia or autism; that they cannot concentrate, focus or remember; who have suffered trauma; They have trouble controlling their impulses.

The foundation, created by Neil Peterson to help his children who suffered from dyslexia and lack of attention, assists young people with attention problems.

"The program helps students train to make the right decisions, to face their personal situations and to find the best solution," said Tim Kniffin, program director of that foundation.

According to Kniffin, these young people attract attention in not very positive ways, which makes them conflictive, fail to obtain good grades, miss classes excessively or even drop out of school.

"Edge is the necessary tool for students who want to improve control of their lives. It is for those who do not think about the consequences of bad decisions, who are impulsive or who do not know why they are doing what they are doing, this can damage their life inside and outside the school," said Kniffin.

"Edge helps students think about what they want, set goals and make manageable plans to go in the right direction. When students can achieve goals, they feel powerful and capable," said the principal.

Kniffin explained that the program is based on the type of training that managers (CEO) of companies receive. "Our philosophy is that if it's good to be a CEO, it's good enough for students."

Since its establishment in 2006, Edge has helped more than 2,000 young people across the country. "The success of our program is based on the fact that young people have a personal connection with their coach, which helps them face their problems and trains them so that they themselves make the right decisions to face the challenges of their lives," said Kniffin.

The program operates in schools thanks to collaboration with school districts. It is currently offered in New York and other eastern states, on the west coast in Arizona, in California and in the state of Washington in 25 schools in Seattle and other cities.

Edge in the Yakima Valley Edge has been in Yakima Valley for two years. Franklin Middle School and Eisenhower High School are the two schools that participate with the project.

For Jewel Brumley, director of Eisenhower, the program has been one of the best tools to help her students. "Last year we were told in the district that if we wanted to implement this program, I accepted because I want to offer all available resources to our students. I am very satisfied because it is really helping young people who were at risk."

Brumley said that in this school year nine students benefit from Edge. Last school year was only offered to special education students, this year it was extended to other students. Eisenhower has seven instructors, "we want to continue offering it to more students, we hope they will approve the resources to train five new trainers. For the next school year we will have 12 coaches. This program is a good option for young people to get ahead," said the director.

Referring to the results, Brumley mentioned a couple of ninth grade students. "When they offered to implement the program I thought about these guys, they couldn't improve their grades, they had serious absenteeism problems. They have been two years in the program and both are going to graduate. Both changed their attitudes towards the school and their grades improved, they will be able to have the necessary credits to receive their diploma, this is a great achievement for them and for the school," he said.

The instructors in the schools are teachers and assistant teachers who received training from the Edge Foundation. "This is a totally voluntary job for those of us interested in helping our students. We are currently seven coaches, but many colleagues want to be part of the program, hopefully we can extend it," said Kirsten Fitterer, facilitator at Eisenhower. For the English teacher with 22 years of experience in the classroom, Edge has become a basic help tool for students whose learning and attention problems are the challenges that impede their academic progress.

“Some children have been diagnosed with attention deficiency, others live very difficult experiences since childhood, they are young people living in extreme poverty, in environments of violence, drug addiction and alcoholism. These students are brilliant, but lack the ability to plan, prioritize the approach and move forward in their studies. Mentors are the adult who listens to them without judging, without forcing them or telling them what to do, we are here to make them face their situations and seek solutions for themselves.”

As an instructor, Fitterer meets with her students once a week, “this space is a sanctuary, they feel protected there, it is the place where they can talk about their problems without being forced to do anything, we just help them decide how to fix your situation.”

This is the first year in which Fitterer participates. “It has been a success for my two students, one of them started in high school and decided to continue in high school; She was involved with gangs and serious behavior problems, this year she is in class to control her anger and get good grades,” she said.

The success of the students has led other schools to show interest in Edge, such as Davis High School, the teacher said.

Enrollment to Edge is the student's decision.

The Edge program offers:

- A personalized study approach.
- Weekly sessions of 20 to 30 minutes with an instructor.
- Sessions led by the student.
- Uses interrogation technique.
- It focuses on student training.
- Train students in the skills of executive functions, such as planning, prioritization, concentration, time management and impulse control.
- Provides necessary tools to obtain personal development.
- Edge Foundation in Yakima
- What: Classes for young people with learning difficulties or challenges.
- Where: Franklin Middle School and Eisenhower High School.
- Reports: In participating schools and at www.edgefoundation.org (in English).