



Rankin Receives Coveted Governor's Award

TUPELO, Miss. — "It takes a village" isn't just a cliché. For Rankin Elementary, it's a reality.

Several years ago, this 3rd-5th grade school joined forces with West Jackson Baptist Church, whose parishioners vowed to care for the staff and students as if they were adopted family.

Because of this valued relationship and the programs that evolved, Rankin will receive the 2019 Mississippi Association of Partnerships In Education Governor's Partnership Award on Tuesday in Hattiesburg at the Governor's Luncheon.

“When our partnership with West Jackson started, we never could have imagined the impact that it would have on our students, teachers and community,” principal Dr. Mitzi Moore said. “This partnership has truly blossomed over the last three years. West Jackson has become further involved at the school over the years, especially in terms of supporting students academically. In the time they had initially spent in the school, they saw certain students were at a disadvantage because they may not have had the support at home they needed to thrive.”

In an effort to create relationships with students and support them in their reading goals, the West Jackson Reading Buddies program was born in October of 2016. Church members are assigned students to read with once a week for 30 minutes, and as a direct result, reading levels have drastically improved, while Moore said students are now more eager to read.

There are also food, clothes and shoe drives for the students. Church liaison, Lisa Hofmister, also attends PTO meetings to ascertain how West Jackson can best meet the needs of the school.

“They not only offer assistance in the academic areas but also offer support for our students’ social, mental and physical needs,” Moore added. “For example, when a student was seriously injured and became paralyzed, West Jackson donated items for a silent auction, staffed a fundraiser night, and sold student-crafted pottery to raise money for a wheelchair-accessible van so he would have transportation to and from school.”

Rankin, a Title I school (based on percentage of students who have free or reduced lunch) has also seen a significant increase in attendance and teacher morale since the inception of this program.

The church often times provides lunches for staff, while also joining students in the cafeteria during lunch. In addition, several of the men’s Sunday School classes have prayer walks throughout the hallways.

“This program gives life to our volunteers,” Hofmister said. “It helps them feel they have a purpose.”

Since the program started, it’s estimated West Jackson has dedicated more than 700 hours of community service to Rankin and has impacted more than 700 students.

“West Jackson Street Baptist Church has showed us it really does take a village to raise a child,” Moore said. “Without the support of our community partners, and West Jackson in particular, we would not be able to make our students’ experiences here at Rankin Elementary nearly as special as we are able to now. Our gratitude to this wonderful organization cannot be overstated.”

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