

GIVING 'THE TOOLS TO CHANGE THEMSELVES'

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BELOIT — Robinson Elementary School is launching a new after-school program to improve the behavior and academic achievement of at-risk kids.

The Young Eagles Success (YES) Club Character Excellence Program is a community youth outreach initiative of Sounds of Good News (SOGN) Productions Music Company of Rockford, Illinois, under the leadership of Carl and Dianna Cole. The Coles began working with at-risk Robinson students on Monday, and will continue with them weekly for the remainder of the school year.

The Coles also hope to present “respect” assemblies at other interested Beloit schools in the future and will be providing a presentation at Robinson’s upcoming soul food dinner.

Dianna Cole said YES Club programming focuses on teaching students how to say yes to success and no to drugs, alcohol, violence, crime and poor grades.

“We are excited to have Dr. Cole spread his positive message to our students in the after school program. He is such a positive individual. We are always looking for new and exciting ways to meet the needs of our students and make character development and emotional growth a key component to Robinson’s success,” said Robinson Principal Sam Carter.

The YES Club has been in the Rockford School District for a decade, and in recent years has expanded into the Freeport and Harlem school districts. For more information, visit www.soundsofgoodnews.com.

Typically, Dianna Cole said teachers, principals and administrators will identify students for the program based on referrals, absenteeism, behavioral issues and academic issues. Roughly 30 kids, to be broken into two groups, are expected to be in Robinson’s YES Club.



Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Dianna and Carl Cole are launching the Young Eagles Success (YES) Club character excellence program at Robinson Elementary School. They will be working with at-risk youth on improving their grades and behavior. The hope is there will be less discipline referrals because of their one-on-one work with the students after school.

By helping students outside of class, the hope is students will behave better and be more respectful during class. Having someone from the outside come into the school helps students learn to be more respectful and gives them a safe place to talk about their personal issues.

Dianna Cole said her husband, known as "Mr. C," uses humor to attack serious issues.

"That's my secret weapon. If you get them laughing you know they are listening," Carl Cole added.

"We do what we consider real talk, and it's uninhibited. We set the stage for the kids to talk about anything," Dianna Cole said. "We in turn, give students the tools to deal with those issues."

Dianna Cole said kids naturally gravitate toward her husband who sometimes uses music in his instruction.

The owner of local McDonald's franchises, Guy Bucciferro, has recently endorsed the program and the YES Club will be going in with its core singing group once a month at select McDonald's restaurants to sing or recite poetry. The children at Robinson will be invited to participate in the events.

Schools with a YES Club, Dianna Cole said, have less school discipline referrals. Some of the kids who may join the club with an attitude, learn to become more respectful.

"Respect is high on the list. You have to respect yourself to respect others. Students learn how to respect their peers and those in authority," she said.

Sometimes, she said, kids can be acting out after dealing with issues at home and teachers can get understandably frustrated. Having a YES Club allows the Coles to get to the heart and root of the problem and add a support program the teachers don't have time for during the busy school day.

"We can't change students, but we can give them the tools to change themselves," Dianna Cole said.