

Lincoln Loggers: Puget Sound M.A.T. grads abound at Tacoma's Lincoln High, and the new extended school-day program they helped launch is starting to soar

Late-June light fills Lincoln High School Co-principal Patrick Erwin's office, where he turns his attention to a steady stream of students, staff, and teachers seeking his swift advice on urgent issues. A school security officer enters and hands Pat freshly taken photos of students leaving campus during school hours. While the two talk, this reporter notices a quote Pat has scrawled on his office whiteboard.

"Fall down seven times, stand up eight."

The security guy leaves.

"It's a Chinese proverb," says Pat, a 1993 Puget Sound M.A.T. grad who, in his late 20s, left a job at Boeing to earn his teaching credentials. "I borrowed it from James Carville's talk at UW Tacoma last year."

Pat knows there will be times when his kids fail or make bad choices, like the students who skipped school, so he tells them what Carville said about Abraham Lincoln, the school's namesake. Lincoln had plenty of failures, but we know him as a winner. "Each time Lincoln fell down, he would stand up again."

Abe did it, and so can you, Pat tells his students. Go ahead, lean into it—just keep getting back up.

Such perseverance is an important component of a two-year-old program he leads with Co-principal Greg Eisnaugle: The Lincoln Center, an extended day school for 9th- and 10th-graders modeled on the remarkably successful Harlem Children's Zone program in New York City.

Lincoln High is the most ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged school in Pierce County. Poverty, nomadic families, gangs, lagging test scores, and truancy are perpetual problems. More than half of the 94-year-old eastside school's students qualify for free lunch. About 85 of Lincoln's 1,500 students are officially homeless, and that's not counting the "couch surfers," who sleep wherever they can.

The Lincoln Center is a positive place for students to be during those critical after-school hours, when trouble is most likely. There are no admission requirements. Any student who is willing to do the work is welcome. The center is located within Lincoln High School and students are in class weekdays from 7:35 a.m. to 5 p.m., plus two Saturdays a month for trips and special opportunities. They also attend two weeks of summer school, for a total of about 500 additional hours of academics a year. About 180 students will enroll next year.

One look at the center's Facebook page shows why students wouldn't want to miss a day of school. The page chronicles student road trips, events, and achievements in pictures, video, and words.

So far, the center seems to be performing as intended. Within a nine-month period in 2009, the center retained 95 percent of its students compared with 83 percent at Lincoln High School, and 85 and 90 percent respectively at neighboring Tacoma high schools Foss and Stadium.

Pat wants to enlarge Lincoln Center—first to include 11th- and 12th-graders, and then expand it to middle and elementary schools. Doing so will help him accomplish his primary purpose at Lincoln: Make sure students are prepared for the next stage of life, and that college is an option. He's getting a lot of help.

Other Loggers employed at Lincoln are Bernadette Ray '99, M.A.T.'01,

Christine Snellgrove M.A.T.'01, Todd Strickland '96, M.A.T.'98, Jennifer Holm '03, M.A.T.'04, Emily Abbott M.A.T.'09, and Aubrey Shelton '05, M.A.T.'06. David Droge, who recently retired as a UPS communication studies prof, interned in Lincoln's Career Counseling Center last year.

Now Pat makes a point of recruiting teachers from Puget Sound's M.A.T. program. (See sidebar below.) Four members of the Class of '10 were on site last semester.

"We want UPS student teachers here. They are hardworking, thoughtful, reflective practitioners who are up to date on best practices," he says.

— Sandra Sarr

M.A.T. + Lincoln High: teachers teaching teachers

Puget Sound's M.A.T. program places seven to eight teacher interns at Lincoln High each year; about half of those students go on to student teach there.

"Our partnership with Lincoln enhances communication and professional growth for educators at both institutions," says Fred Hamel, associate professor in Puget Sound's School of Education. "It builds upon intersections between our work in the School of Education and the good work happening at Lincoln."

Fred and Lincoln's Co-principal Pat Erwin M.A.T.'93 handpick mentor teachers at the high school and match their interests and needs with Puget Sound's M.A.T. students.

"The 15-week student-teaching practicum can be a transforming experience," says Fred, whose role, in part, is to develop relationships between Tacoma-area schools and the Puget Sound School of Education. "Sustained relationships with other schools allow for strong placements and ongoing conversations about quality teaching."

Bernadette Ray '99, M.A.T.'01, a former student of Fred's and now an English teacher at Lincoln, is an important liaison at the school. "One great part about the M.A.T./Lincoln partnership," says Bernadette, "is that most teachers didn't go to a school like Lincoln, but that's where a lot of the jobs are for new teachers."

Fred has been visiting Bernadette's first-period English class for more than three years. At Lincoln, he provides feedback and support in the classroom, communicates with mentor teachers, and brings in his own Puget Sound classes to interact with students. He says he likes how so much time on-site keeps him connected to teaching in a public-school setting. "It helps me remain part of a grounded conversation about teaching," he says.

The Lincoln/M.A.T. partnership involves Lincoln faculty meeting with education students on the Puget Sound campus; meetings for interns, mentors, and School of Education faculty at Lincoln; and discussions on teaching, culture, and curriculum. In October Lincoln Center faculty will be presenting at Puget Sound's national conference on race and pedagogy.

"M.A.T. students find a thriving professional community at Lincoln," says Fred. "And they are changed by it."



CLASS OF THEIR OWN M.A.T. grads (left to right) Todd Strickland, Aubrey Shelton, Pat Erwin, Jennifer Holm, Bernadette Ray, and Professor Fred Hamel.