

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Teen Leadership Conference **provides valuable skills to students**

When Albert Gonzales was involved in a gang life of crime and drug addiction in Orange County during the early 1980s, he certainly wasn't thinking about making a difference in anyone's life.

"I came from a very rough background," Gonzales said. "I made some very poor decisions. I understand now that I didn't have to make those decisions no matter what my circumstances were growing up, and I want today's young people to realize that."



After managing to pull himself out of the self-destructive pattern of his youth, Gonzales has since devoted his life to spreading his message to students nationwide.

He addressed a Teen Leadership Conference, sponsored by Herff Jones, at Canyon Lake High on Sept. 30, which included students from Canyon, Smithson Valley, Canyon Lake, San Marcos and Seguin high schools.

More than 150 students attended, ranging from all walks of life.

"We wanted to bring a very diverse group," Canyon High social worker Rosena Lahti said. "We have student council members, students we think have great leadership potential, and at-risk students here we feel can greatly benefit from a forum like this."

Gonzales told the students the story of how he made it through his tumultuous youth and his philosophies on making the most of any situation.

“We all have to go through different challenges,” Gonzales said. “You can decide to carry your baggage or let it go. We all have the same opportunities once you walk through those classroom doors.”

During the second half of the conference, students broke up into smaller groups and interacted with people from other high schools.

Gonzales had the students participate in games and drills geared toward breaking down social and cultural barriers. He said his goal was to have the students use the leadership skills learned in the conference on their campus.

“I want them to take what they learned here and become leaders and mentors at their schools,” Gonzales said. “I want them to realize that any student can be someone others look up to if they are doing the right things.”

The conference had an immediate impact on many students.

“I think this is a wonderful experience,” Smithson Valley High junior Bria Burrell said. “I think we’ve all learned some very simple steps and patterns to follow to be leaders on campus.”

Canyon Lake High senior Joe Schone agreed.

“It’s great students from different high schools are able to come together, meet and interact with each other,” Schone said. “A lot of us come from different areas, but I think we learned we really have a lot in common. We learned part of being a leader is realizing we can get along and accomplish things no matter how different we appear to be.”

Canyon Lake High principal Cheryl Koury said it was an honor to hold the Teen Leadership Conference on her campus.

“What a wonderful opportunity this was,” Koury said. “I think these students learned skills today that will carry on well into adulthood, and those are the kinds of lessons that are invaluable.”

IN PHOTOS:

Motivational speaker Albert Gonzales inspired students at a Teen Leadership Conference at Canyon Lake High on Sept. 30, with a message geared toward making the most of your opportunities no matter what your social or cultural background.

Canyon High students Emily O'Neill (left) and Megan Knetsch go through a drill at the Teen Leadership Conference at Canyon Lake High. Motivational speaker Albert Gonzales had students from five different high schools participate in games and drills geared toward breaking down social and cultural barriers.

Seguin High students Karlee Scheel (left) and Brooke Abrameit show off their dance moves during the Teen Leadership Conference at Canyon Lake High on Sept. 30. Students from Canyon, Smithson Valley, San Marcos, Seguin and Canyon Lake high schools participated in the event.