

Aurora Central High School

Aurora Central High School began the FIRE Within in January 2015 as a first year school with an Early Warning Intervention (EWI) class for students at high risk of dropping out of school due to poor academic performance, low attendance, substance abuse, gang involvement, and other challenges.

After doing a school-wide survey, FIRE students determined that one out four of their peers didn't have anyone in the building they felt they could trust, which was causing high levels of stress, depression, defiance, and a sense of hopelessness. In response, the students developed a CD or "mixed tape" includes original student composed songs as well as interviews with safe, helping adults in the building such as counselors, coaches, and trusted teachers. The goal of their business, the Trojan T.R.U.S.T. Builders, was to open lines of communication between youth and adults, to build a more cohesive student community, and to reduce stigma around help-seeking behavior.

***"The process of this whole project was amazing because of how many people actually listen to each other and help one another."
-Aurora Central High School Student***



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In the larger Aurora community, the class worked with a local music marketing manager to get recommendations on producing, marketing, and selling their product – ultimately hosting two school-wide launch events and selling their CD both online and in-person. They presented their accomplishments to the Aurora Public School Board of Education, competed as finalists in the national Business Plan Competition, and won \$350 in seed funding for their enterprise.

Classroom teachers closely monitored the students' progress and reported continual increases in academics, attendance, class and school engagement, improved teamwork skills, stronger class cohesion, improved knowledge about business principles, better understanding of school and social issues, and increased self-confidence.



"I am shocked at the transformation some of these students have made... This program showed these kids how they could use their natural talents for something that serves a community in need. "
***-FIRE Within Educator,
Aurora Central***