

Link Crew connects students with mentors

Goal of program is to help new students feel more comfortable

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The Link Crew is a new program at Hastings High School that helps the transition for freshmen throughout their first year at the school.

Studies show peer pressure is important to students in high school. While the Link Crew program isn't exactly dealing with peer pressure, it might aptly be called "peer mentorship."

Built on the belief that students can help other students succeed, 90 juniors and seniors at the school were trained by program coordinators Scott Smallidge (social studies teacher), Paul Vaith (assistant principal) and Naomi Marietta (counselor) to step outside their comfort zone and become role models and mentors to the new students.

Freshmen at the high school started school one day earlier than the rest of the student body. Signs and posters read, "Welcome Class of 2010."

New classmates they might otherwise have been intimidated to talk to greeted them. Those classmates are to be their role models and mentors during the first year.

The first day was filled with activities to help everyone get to

know each other. At lunch, the freshmen were told about all the activities available to them and encouraged to join some of them.

The students took tours around the building, and they found out where their lockers are located.

Brook Beskau, a senior, and Kelsey Gandier, a junior, were the two students trained and responsible for organizing the first day — ordering the T-shirts, making a CD of upbeat music, just generally getting things ready. Along with about 90 seniors and juniors, Beskau and Gandier took an additional two days of training to act as mentors.

Beskau was happy with the way the day went.

"I think things went really well," she said. "I think there are things we need to do next year, but we learned from what we did well this year."

She wished the program had been in place when she was a freshman.

"I was really intimidated by the older kids when I was a freshman," Beskau said. "I think these freshmen are going to be comfortable. The goal is for them to talk to us as they need to during the year."

The opening activities were designed to help everyone get to know each other. They put students together who didn't know each other, so they faced the challenge of working together without knowing each other.

Beskau felt they had succeeded in getting the new students to open up because they were asking ques-



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Without other students around prior to the start of school, it was a good day for freshmen to try to open their lockers. With the Link Crew at Hastings High School, opening lockers could be worked out before the pressures of getting to class on time.

tions by lunch — questions that on a normal day they might not have asked.

"They mainly asked directional questions, like how to find something or get somewhere," she said. "But they also asked what to do if their schedules were wrong, or how to work with lunch money."

The new freshmen confirmed Beskau's assessment. They mentioned the program was good because it helped them learn their way around. With five minutes between classes, you have to know where you're going to get to your next class on time.

New freshmen Jared Bents, Faro Brown Eyes and Jordan Kluge all expressed their gratitude about now knowing their way around. Bents and Brown liked learning at lunch about the activi-

ties available to them at their new school. Kluge liked knowing someone who could help him if he had a question and considered signing up for a few activities.

"I don't know yet, though," Kluge said. "First I have to make sure I can keep my grades up."

The new students and their mentors will have lockers close to each other. That way there's time in the morning and at the end of the day to touch base.

"They'll know how to find us," Beskau said.

Beskau felt she got a lot out of the program too.

"I felt it was a good learning experience," she said. "We've got good relations with the freshmen, a kind of a bond. It felt good to help."