

In Ky., teaching kids optimism, empathy, gratitude [Terry DeMio, tdemio@enquirer.com](mailto:tdemio@enquirer.com) 12:06 a.m. EST February 8, 2015

NKY Prevention Alliance kicks off Core Life pilot in area schools.



(Photo: The Enquirer/Kareem Elgazzar)

DAYTON – It’s easy for adults to think kids should be responsible, optimistic, honest, even empathetic.

But if kids aren’t taught those traits, how can they be expected to use them?

A new program in Northern Kentucky called Core Life is about to address the quandary. A pilot of Core Life starts with third graders at Lincoln Elementary School in Dayton.

“We must shift our thinking from ‘Kids should have these skills’ to ‘We must teach these skills,’” said Dayton Independent Schools Superintendent Jay Brewer.

While different schools will apply Core Life lessons in their own way, the program is expected to be used throughout Northern Kentucky. It was developed by the [Northern Kentucky Prevention Alliance](#) and a marketing team at the Creative Department agency in Over-the-Rhine as a strategy to prevent substance abuse. But it also serves to help kids grow emotionally and socially.

Tuesday evening was the Core Life kickoff at Lincoln Elementary, with parents learning about how their third-graders will get a lesson in a character asset each week for 13 weeks. Parents also were asked to help their kids stay engaged with the program.

The 13 “core” assets that will be taught are: respect, responsibility, rules, goals, volunteering, empathy, gratitude, tolerance, healthy living, moderation, honesty, wisdom and optimism.

Grant County’s Sherman Elementary is also piloting the program, with fourth-grade students, said Bonnie Hedrick, a behavioral health specialist and coordinator for NKY Prevention Alliance. And Boone County Library Youth Services will host a Core Life pilot beginning on

Feb. 19 for its family reading program. Library staff are identifying children's books that correspond to five concepts presented in Core Life.

An evaluator from Northern Kentucky University, psychologist Victor Ronis-Tobin, will study how each of the schools presents the program in different settings and for different ages. His analysis should help determine if the program needs tweaking for use elsewhere.

Kary South, the mother of third-grader Gannon, attended the introduction to Core Life at Lincoln Elementary on Tuesday and was impressed with the concept.

“It’s giving them the tools they need to become a good person,” South said. “They’ll have a good base to make the right choices.

“It’s one thing to simply tell kids what not to do – “like, ‘Don’t do drugs,’ ” South said. Core Life, instead, looks at the positive.

“I think this will help them even with their school lessons, to become a responsible person. Those are things to live your life well,” South said.

Hedrick said Core Life is just one of several substance-abuse prevention strategies that are being developed in Northern Kentucky. Other programs will address students in middle school and high school. To learn more about the NKY Prevention Alliance and its programs, visit drugfreenky.org.

Brewer said the assets that kids will learn are important to lifelong social skills.

“The goal of this asset-development program is to build that solid core in our students so that when faced with life’s greater challenges, like drugs, they are able to stand strong and make good decisions,” Brewer said.

Interact for Health, NorthKey Community Car and the R.C. Durr Foundation have helped fund the Core Life program.