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May 21, 2012

Cody, Osborn principals to be honored

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A few years ago, Cody and Osborn high schools in Detroit were slapped with an ugly nickname -- dropout factory.

Now, four years after the schools were reorganized into smaller learning communities, attendance has increased and four-year dropout rates have gone from 24% in 2008 at Cody to 9.4%, and have fallen from 23% to 18% at Osborn.

The principals -- Johnathan Matthews, Mary Kovari, Michelle Parker, Charlene Mallory and Lisa Robinson at Cody, and Calvin Patillo, Felicia Cook, Tanya Bowman and Antoinette Pearson at Osborn -- will be honored Tuesday during the Heroes at Sunrise awards ceremony.

The event, organized by Michigan's Children, an independent advocacy organization in Lansing, will be at the Gem Theater in Detroit.

"What has been accomplished, with the help of the United Way and the General Motors Foundation, is quite remarkable," said Jack Kresnak, president of Michigan's Children.

The schools are the first of nine Turnaround Schools. They are undergoing transformation with help from the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, the Skillman Foundation and the GM Foundation, which gave \$27.1 million last year to the effort -- the foundation's largest donation ever.

Students at each building are part of a smaller, theme-focused learning community where they interact daily with a maximum of about 400 students. The new learning communities have not enrolled any 12th-graders yet, so there is no information on the impact on graduation rates.

Michael Tenbusch, vice president for education at United Way, said the progress is due to the close relationships formed between teachers and students in the smaller schools.

"The greatest achievement so far has been the schools' transformation into places where all kids feel loved and honored, and now the kids are owning things like progress on their ACT scores, their future and even how to make the communities around them safer and stronger," Tenbusch said. "The staff and the students have moved from being the victims to the drivers of their fate in a very short time."

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