

# Commission on Human Rights

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## **Bardstown Middle School becomes first middle school in KY to form its own Youth Human Rights Council**

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Bardstown, Ky. – Today, Bardstown Middle School becomes the first middle school in the state to form its own Youth Council on Human Rights.

The school joins Central and Seneca high schools in Louisville, Ky., and Bardstown High School with establishing youth human rights councils in conjunction with the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Youth Human Rights Council Establishment Program.

This afternoon, Commission Representative Glenda Green conducted the middle school's first council training. The training was given to students who said they want to serve as core members. All interested students at the school were invited to attend, however.

So far, according to Kelly Harrison, Positive Approach to Students Success (PASS) Program Specialist for Bardstown Middle School, 20 students have signed up to serve on the council and are eager to get going on establishing the council's goals.

Harrison said: "We have a lot of students who have interests in making sure we are reaching all of our kids and helping them with regard to social and other issues they face that become barriers to success. This new council will help give our students a voice in our school system and ownership in the success of the school.

"When we learned of this opportunity to form a Youth Human Rights Council with the help of the state human rights commission, it became one of our main focuses," he said.

When asked what issues the students want to address, Harrison replied that they have said they want to find ways to help their fellows who are in at-risk categories caused from poverty, lack of parental support, learning disabilities, and the challenges of tackling both home and school issues.

"The kids excitedly talk about making education completely accessible and reaching all of our students," he said.

Today's council training was attended by seventh and eighth graders. In January, sixth grade will be incorporated into the middle school at which time interested sixth grade students will have the opportunity to participate, he said.

Bardstown Middle School Principal Bob Blackmon commended Harrison for overseeing the new council. "Mr. Harrison first initiated a student representative council, and it seemed like a natural thing to incorporate a Youth Human Rights Council along with it," Blackmon said.

The state human rights commission last year introduced the School Youth Human Rights Council Establishment Program, which provides schools with guidance and training, and helps schools create a venue for students to learn how to become civically active by helping others and promoting harmony and peace among their student bodies.

"This is an important way to help our students realize their potential in using a student voice in areas they see as important to work on," Blackmon said. "Students have totally different perspectives than adults about their school culture, and we look forward to their being able to utilize the Youth Human Rights Council as a positive and proactive tool for giving us feedback and for making a better school and a better world," he said.

"We are proud to help Kentucky schools establish their own Youth Human Rights Councils," said John J. Johnson, executive director of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights. "We hope all Kentucky school administrators take advantage of the program and give their students this opportunity to be a part of changing the world around them for the better," Johnson said.

"Congratulations to Bardstown Middle School and the City of Bardstown for having the first Middle School Youth Human Rights Council in Kentucky," he said.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government agency that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act and the U.S. Civil Rights Act. The laws make discrimination illegal. For help with discrimination or for information about forming a Youth Human Rights Council at your school, call the commission at 1.800.292.5566.