

WSU News

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Wichita State, USD 259 partner to help children with Tenacious Men program

By Paul Suellentrop

- **Tenacious Men aims to help 20 children from USD 259 with mentoring and STEM education.**
- **The program is sponsored by Textron Aviation and begins in January.**
- **Mentoring topics will include business, careers, etiquette and dress.**

Third grade is not too early to learn to tie a tie, discover a love of math and direct a young life on the right path.

“We want to be part of the solution,” said Kevin Harrison, community engagement coordinator for the Office of Military, Veterans and First Responders at Wichita State University. “We believe there are no bad kids. There may be some kids who have made some bad decisions. There may be kids who have been in bad situations. We want to see if we can help kids change that trajectory.”

Wichita State’s Office of Military, Veterans and First Responders is organizing Tenacious Men, a program designed to provide mentoring and STEM education for under-represented students in Wichita Public Schools. The program, which will begin in January, will serve 10 third-graders and 10 fourth-graders and is sponsored by Textron Aviation.

“It’s essential to the future of our business that we foster a thriving, diverse community where everyone has the opportunity to be successful,” said Maggie Topping, senior vice president of Human Resources and Communications at Textron Aviation. “WSU is a driving force in educating, empowering and mobilizing the community to foster and sustain an inclusive campus, and it’s been an honor to work alongside them to grow their efforts.”

Wichita State and Wichita Public Schools will recruit mentors to work with the students, emphasizing adults with backgrounds and stories that the children can identify with. Topics will range from mentors discussing a successful business to learning how to tie a tie or dinner etiquette.

“It’s going to be character, the way you present yourself to other people, the way to present yourself in a professional manner,” Harrison said. “Hopefully, pairing them up with these types of mentors will have an impact.”

“Putting your best foot forward” is one of the program’s tenets.

“That has a double meaning,” Harrison said. “One, is that you always have to be your best, so you need to always be prepared for any situation. The other is that you also have to look the part. You don’t have to have a million dollars in the bank to have nice looking shoes. It just takes some time and it takes some pride in what you’re doing. We want to use that as a template to get kids in the mind-set of being the best they can be.”

STEM education is also an important part of the program. Harrison wants Tenacious Men to encourage the students to consider science, technology, engineering and math, and defeat stereotypes by exposing them to interesting activities and concepts. He plans for students to create their own avatar early in the program as a way to introduce them to coding skills.

“We’re hoping we can generate an interest that will continue,” he said. “Kids convince themselves early on that ‘I’m not good at math.’ It’s just not true. We make it true if we continue to tell ourselves something.”

While details are under discussion, the program may bring students to Wichita State’s campus for some activities.

“I can’t expect you to aspire to go to college if you’ve never walked on the college campus that’s right in your own neighborhood,” Harrison said.