

KeizerCommunity

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Middle schoolers rewarded for turning it around

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Eighth-graders Emma Gonzalez from Claggett Creek Middle School and Logan Hunt from Whiteaker Middle School were two of 20 kids across the Salem-Keizer community that were recognized at the 25th annual Turnaround Achievement Awards last month.

The Turnaround Achievement Awards recognize middle and high-school students who demonstrate effort, commitment and perseverance in the face of adversity and shine a spotlight on students that have shown personal improvement in their academics, behavior or attitude.

"These awards are so meaningful and truly encompass the true grit, determination and perseverance our students hold," said Salem-Keizer Public Schools Superintendent Christy Perry. "Over the past 25 years, it has been a privilege to honor our students and the positive changes they have made."

For Gonzalez, one of the big reasons for the turnaround was having a more active social life at school.

"Last year, everyone was scared of me and wouldn't really talk to me. But this year, everyone started talking to me, so I got happy," Gonzalez said.

Sam Wilkerson, who has been Gonzalez's counselor for the last three years, has taken notice of how she has done a better job of engaging in social interactions this year.

"She has done a good job of making new friends and people see that she isn't intimidating," Wilkerson said. "I think her true colors came to light, because



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she's a kind person who cares a lot about her family and friends. It's been really exciting to see her shift."

Gonzalez also shared how important it has been for her to not only develop relationships with her classmates, but with her teachers as well.

And as those relationships formed, Gonzalez's schoolwork started to improve as well, going from a 2.3 grade-point-average to a 3.2.

"I have been talking to teachers. Last year, I wouldn't

talk to them or anything. But this year, I actually got to know them and actually started liking them," Gonzalez said. "It's been easier to do my work because I haven't been getting in trouble and I haven't been suspended. I've been trying to do good and now I am actually getting good grades."

Gonzalez hopes to continue her success at McNary next year where she hopes to get involved with the school AVID program.

"It's been great to see the turnaround. I knew that she always had it in her. You have to give a lot of credit to her, but also the whole staff," Wilkerson said. "I think Erika deserves all the credit and recognition that she has been given."

Hunt's turnaround, on the other hand, had a lot to do with the increase in his effort and coming to the realization that



LEFT: Sam Wilkerson, Emma Gonzalez and Jen Williams. ABOVE: Logan Hunt.

being more important," Hunt said. "I still don't like school. I'd rather be at home laying down, but it's important because I want to get a good education like all my other family members."

Hunt has had Lisa Perkins as a teacher throughout middle school, and she has gotten to see first hand the improvements he has made in his academics and behavior.

"There's a much bigger change from the sixth grade," Perkins said. "His effort has definitely increased. He now sees the value of getting his work turned in on time and sees the value of the education he is getting here."

"Logan has a lot of people that have been with him since

sixth grade. We're all a family here at this school. We take care of all of our students."

Hunt is incredibly thankful for his teacher for not giving up on him.

"Ms. Perkins has stuck it out with me for a long time," Hunt said. "She has made school so much easier and has helped with big projects using baby steps."

"She has been there for me." Hunt will also be attending McNary next school year and is excited to join the Celtics band. He played the baritone throughout middle school, but wants to switch to the trombone in high school.

"I didn't really participate in sixth grade, but now I'm beating it," Hunt said.

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