

From 8 to GR8

The SUCCESS Foundation's newest in-school program inspires teens to greatness.

by DAVID LEE

DJ Rock-T walks down the halls of Dallas's Skyline High School with noticeable confidence. He's comfortable here. He knows he's helping to change lives here.

Following him are two staff writers and a photographer for the school newspaper. They are looking for a quiet place to conduct their interview. They're interrupted by a loud bell signaling lunch period.

The place is suddenly electric. Hundreds of hungry teenagers quickly fill the halls, rushing toward the cafeteria. Rock-T smiles as his eyes dart side to side, watching the kids unwind with their friends and grab their lunches. He walks over to a group of students, introduces himself and hands over a copy of *SUCCESS for Teens*[®]. Other students recognize him and wander over to the swelling crowd. The school paper's photographer snaps some pictures.

Rock-T (Rocky Turner), a DJ for the nationally syndicated "Rickey Smiley Morning Show," is planting the seed for an upcoming school-wide assembly. The assembly will officially launch the Eight to GR8 program at Skyline—home to more than 5,000 teenagers and one of the largest high schools in the country.

The Eight to GR8 program is based on the eight lessons in *SUCCESS for Teens* and is part of the SUCCESS Foundation's mission to equip America's youth with key success principles and the personal-development resources they need to reach new levels of achievement. Rock-T serves as the SUCCESS Foundation's celebrity voice in schools. The customized program consists of 32 principles, or lessons. Through a scripted audio, a "jam," Rock-T reviews each principle and talks about how it applies to the students' lives. "It's packaged to deliver with minimal teacher prep time," says Kate Gardner, SUCCESS Foundation development director and former educator. The students are asked to read a few pages of *SUCCESS for Teens* each week, emphasizing how making small, positive choices can compound to create tremendous results.

Skyline Principal Harold Wright says the program fits perfectly with the school's current character curriculum. "This

is exactly what I was looking for," he says. "I felt like a little bit more was needed on top of our guidance program. Some of the kids know what they need to do, but it reinforces their ideas about what they're doing now and where they need to go. If the students embrace those principles in the book, I think it's really going to help shape and mold the futures they choose to go into—in terms of college or a career opportunity."

Wright says his teachers were very receptive to the program, and many of them even read the book and shared it with their own kids at home. He says he's happy to see everyone working together and sending the message to the kids that they care: "We care enough to implement a program such as *SUCCESS for Teens* on our campus to help [students] become better citizens and productive people."

Voice for Success

Rock-T, who has inspired youth for years through his own organization, says, "When I stumbled upon *SUCCESS for Teens*, it was a perfect fit."

The Eight to GR8 program is being piloted in several schools across America. The Dallas Independent School District [DISD]—one of the largest school districts in the country, with more than 150,000 students enrolled—is introducing the program in many of its more than 70 middle and high schools.

"Character coaching and development is essential in helping our youth understand how their day-to-day decisions impact the outcomes in their lives," says DISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa. "We are grateful to the SUCCESS Foundation for piloting the *SUCCESS for Teens* program in our school district, and we look forward to evaluating the results."

Katrina Lucas is a teacher at Seagoville High School in the DISD. The school created what they call the Pathways to Success program to help the freshman class make the transition from middle school to high school. She says *SUCCESS for Teens* is the perfect curriculum for the class. The stories in the book from actual teenagers directly relate to what her students are experiencing in their own lives. "It seems more real-world about what they're going through," she says. "They see themselves in some of the stories, or at least, they see their friends."

A freshman assembly with Rock-T kicked off the Seagoville program at the beginning of the spring semester. "The kids are pretty receptive," Lucas says, "but I think the key to that is when Rock-T came out and did the kickoff himself. He actually talked to them and gave them an idea of what to look forward to."

Excited to Succeed

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, more than a million students who enter ninth grade fail to graduate with their peers four years later. Why? "Kids are bored," Rock-T says. He believes that's one of the main forces contributing to



“The teachers and principals have enough on their plates. Now we have this great program that works itself.”

—DJ Rock-T

“I think we’ve figured out a pretty good formula here, and I think it’s going to stick.”

Keeping the Engine Running

SUCCESS for Teens and *Eight to GR8* are provided for schools and organizations to request at no cost. Having the funding to meet growing demand is the biggest hurdle. Since its inception in 2008, the *SUCCESS* Foundation has delivered nearly 2 million copies of *SUCCESS for Teens* to teenagers across the country, thanks largely to donations from those seeking to impact the lives of tomorrow’s leaders.

John Fleming, executive director of the *SUCCESS* Foundation, believes that teaching youth the principles of personal development and character building is critical to shaping a better future. He also knows the *SUCCESS* Foundation’s work will continue with the help of partners who share that same vision.

“The *SUCCESS* Foundation views the future through our youth,” he says. “We know they are challenged. We also know the principles of personal development advocated in our *SUCCESS for Teens* program are character-development lessons that can be life-changing. If we envision a positive future, which is always the dream and hope of mankind, we must support our youth with the positive food their minds need. We encourage anyone who cares about our youth to support us in our efforts to be a positive change in the world. Every \$1 we receive ensures that another teen receives *SUCCESS for Teens!*” **S**

More on the SUCCESS Foundation and the SUCCESS for Teens/Eight to GR8 program can be found at www.successfoundation.org.

America’s dropout rate. You have to bring excitement back to education. The reason why this book is so powerful, and the reason why it will work, is every principle in the book everyone knows about, but the kids don’t know how to execute them. That’s where I come in. I’m taking these principles and breaking them down so they know how to make them work.”

Wright agrees: “I think Rock-T is the catalyst; he brings excitement and enthusiasm. I think he’s the person who’s really going to light the fire behind these teenagers.”

Rock-T says of all the many pep rallies and assemblies he’s done over the years at schools, this is the first time the kids are actually attentive and are responding: