

# The Henderson Gleaner

Henderson Kentucky

## Speaker helps students focus on leadership, responsibility

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The Reisha King you knew Friday is probably not the same Reisha King you met on Monday or will meet today.

The new Reisha King -- still soft-spoken, still part of the Goth clique at Henderson County High School, still 16 years old -- may be feeling a bit different now.

That's because a transformation began on Saturday, when she and roughly 20 others attended a Youth Leadership Conference at County High.

Led by Hasan Davis -- a law school graduate who came from troubled beginnings to lead seminars on leadership, responsibility and communication -- the conference was the second-annual event at the high school to promote independent, mature thinking among this generation's high schoolers.

Davis, the state's chairman on the Governor's Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice, has no working definition of leadership, which he calls a "fluid" idea. He did not press his audience to be solely a little more polite, or to stand up straight, or to get good grades ... some of the more routine advice one hears as a youth. What he focused on was creative problem solving, hard work, positive thinking, confidence building and the willingness to take productive risks -- all of which, he said, will make one a leader in his or her own right.

"If you don't look at the world differently, then the world won't change," Davis said. "If you risk nothing, you gain nothing, and it's a stalemate."

Davis knows more than a little about risk. Diagnosed with learning disabled/attention deficit hyperactive disorder at an early age, he was arrested at age 11 and expelled from an alternative school when he was 18.

After earning his graduate equivalency diploma from the Georgia Department of Education, Davis enrolled in Berea College, where he was twice expelled before receiving his bachelor's of arts in oral communications.

His experiences taught him that hard work and struggle, as well as good communication skills, were the key to



Hasan Davis speaks to students during a leadership conference Saturday. (Gleaner photo by Darrin Phegley)

success. In his own case, his past experiences led him to receive a law degree from the University of Kentucky.

Davis' background is not representative of all those who attended Saturday's seminar. But students said that, despite the differences, they could relate to his ideas.

"(Davis) really knew what he was talking about," said Jesse Gillham, a 15-year-old freshman who attended the conference with some of his friends. "He was personable, he was a good dynamic speaker and he knew how to work with high school kids."

Sophomore King praised the seminar's focus on interactive exercises that encouraged thinking about one's impact on others.

"I don't consider myself to be a leader, but I think I am a better person for coming to this event," she said.

King, whose favorite classes are art, English and theater, said the presentation made her feel more confident about asking questions in class. She also said that she developed a clearer idea of how it is possible for her to progress as a person into adulthood.

"I think there was a lot of honesty today," the Robards resident said. "The things we do now don't determine who we will become."

Henderson resident and high school senior Emily Roethemeier agreed. She attended the seminar in order to maintain her motivation. This is her last year of high school, and she is already feeling some effects of "senioritis".

"(The conference) reassured me," Roethemeier said, "that I ... can accomplish anything I would most likely like to be."