



Dr. Tom Leonard reads to Little Broncos pre-schoolers who attend the Early Learning program at BHS.

Little Broncos at BHS

The magic is everything but miniature

Tucked away in the lower level of Barrington High School is a unique program that serves a wide range of children and adults, students and staff. While it is not the typical classroom found in most high schools, it is a tiny place for tiny people that is something wonderful to witness.

The Little Broncos Day School began nine years ago to provide meaningful interaction between 3- to 5-year-olds and high school students. The program is self-funded, meaning parents of the young children pay a fee that covers all costs. Little Broncos is a safe, caring place where high school students in the Early Childhood program can learn first-hand about teaching, but this is only one of many advantages.

The high school offers three levels of Early Childhood classes to sophomores, juniors and seniors. For the 105 high-school students enrolled in the program this year, such an environment allows them to learn about child development, both from their instructors and from textbooks, but also by working directly with young children. Since Little Broncos is located in the high school, students can fit the classes conveniently into their schedules without leaving campus.

For the 3-to-5-year-old Little Broncos, they not only learn from certified teachers who oversee the program under the direction of Brenda Homola, but they also enjoy their special high-school-age teachers and friends. The relationships between the 16- to 18-year-old students and the 3-to-5-year-olds are amazing to watch.

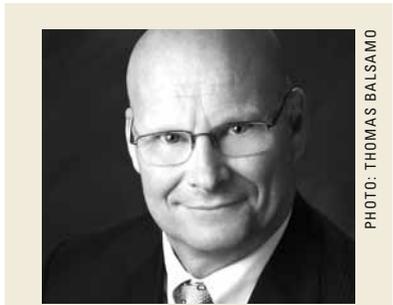


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The children will greet their Big Bronco student teachers and address them as “Miss Leslie” or “Mr. Ryan.” The ratio of high school students to Little Broncos is almost one-to-one, with the little ones receiving individualized and supervised instruction. The high-schoolers prepare art, science, language arts and math lessons for the pre-schoolers, allow child-directed learning through play, and even conduct classroom observations through a one-way mirror in an adjacent room.

Over the years, many BHS students have decided during their Little Broncos experience that teaching was, or was not, their calling. Either way, that knowledge can be helpful. For those who do pursue a degree and a career in education, the hands-on experience Little Broncos offers has an enduring value. Janet Schultz, the teacher who oversees our high school students in the Early Childhood program, often receives warm notes from alumni. Christine Hewitt, a 2008 Barrington High School graduate who is now a senior nearing completion of her degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Dayton (Ohio), recently wrote Mrs. Schultz, “Taking your pre-school course showed me education always will be where my heart is,” she said. “Your classroom was really a joy and everything that you had us do all makes sense now.”

A hallmark of the Little Broncos program is the unprecedented number of high school students who have been either finalists or recipients in the prestigious Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program, which recruits and prepares a diverse group of bright and talented seniors who demonstrate promise for successful careers in teaching. In the past four years, nine BHS students have advanced to the highest points in this elite scholarship competition – an extraordinary number for any single Illinois school. This year alone, four BHS seniors – Paige Dunseith, Leslie Martin, Daisy Gomez and Deena Davis – are frontrunners for the award.

Another purpose of the Little Broncos Day School is to attract, support and retain our employees who have young children. For some faculty members (especially at the high school) who themselves are raising families, having reliable childcare within their workplace helps these parents manage hectic schedules. Our staff can stop in during their own lunch or planning periods to spend a few moments with their child, and they



Golden Apple finalists Leslie Martin, Deena Davis, Paige Dunseith and Daisy Gomez with teacher Janet Schultz, who oversees high school students participating in the Early Childhood program at BHS.



Golden Apple Finalist Daisy Gomez

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avoid rushing to and from an offsite daycare center each day. Repeatedly, research verifies the most important factor in student achievement is securing an excellent educator for each classroom. I recall once trying to recruit a fabulous teacher from a higher-paying school district. After she mentioned her young twins, I eagerly took her on a tour of our Little Broncos Day School. She quickly accepted the position at Barrington High School.

Having a pre-school at BHS embodies the benefits of a “unit” school district that educates children ages 3 through 18. I have seen the presence of little kids melt the demeanor of the toughest football players. Once while walking through the halls, I overheard a 6-foot-2-inch, 220-pound linebacker tell his friend, “Hey, watch your language; there are little kids over there.” Even more amazing is to observe the attentiveness of high school students during a fire drill. The 3-to-5-year-old Little Broncos line up holding hands and walk through the halls alongside the big kids. As the younger ones are noticed, the sea of high-school students parts, allowing the pre-schoolers safe passage.

Our Little Broncos are part of the high school, joining student assemblies for athletic events and state recognitions and cheering during Sidewinders (when the marching band leads a winning team through the hallways). They even have a float in the annual Homecoming Parade and a Little Broncos graduation ceremony each spring in the auditorium, complete with caps and gowns.

Sometimes with new initiatives, you just get lucky. The Little Broncos Day School is one of those dividends of good fortune: a self-funded, staff-friendly program that serves the needs of students at both ends of the education spectrum. Plus, the pint-sized kids are darn cute and a lot of fun. Next time you’re around Barrington High School, stop by and visit a special place where the magic is everything but miniature. 



Golden Apple Finalist Deena Davis



Golden Apple Finalist Leslie Martin



Golden Apple Finalist Paige Dunseith