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School of the Week: Bodine prepares students to be ambassadors of the community

The success of William W. Bodine High School for International Affairs does not just rely on the students' academic excellence and personal growth.

The teachers, staff and faculty at the school also play a pivotal role by giving students opportunities they might not receive anywhere else.

The school's mission is to provide students with a comprehensive educational experience that expands students' knowledge of global issues and prepares them for a lifetime of achievement and participation in local, national and global communities.

"Bodine is always evolving and that is one of the many things that is so exciting about this school," said principal Michele Dawson. "Through our programming, partnerships and college preparatory curriculum, we're constantly finding different ways for our kids to be successful."

Located at 1101 N. 4th St. in the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia, Bodine was founded in 1981 as a partnership between the School District of Philadelphia and the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia.

The magnet school is the first public high school to be co-sponsored by a private world affairs organization. The school, which has 595 students, celebrated 40 years last fall.

“We’re proud of our partnership with the World Affairs Council and we actually received a donation of 5,000 from them,” Dawson said. “We’re currently looking at different ways to spend the money.

“We will be using the money to do some things for our students; we want to do an incentive program for them,” she added. “We want to expand our Bodine garden, which is outside.

“We’re also looking for community organizations that we can give some of the money to because we want to pay it forward and help someone else,” she added.

Bodine offers students a variety of college-preparatory programs including advanced placement courses, a dual enrollment program with Harrisburg University and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, a comprehensive two-year curriculum which promotes student autonomy, independent research, and post-modern educational environment.

The school also wants to offer students additional courses including a law elective, which will be taught by one of the social studies teachers.

“The law elective will be examining the laws that we have in our country and how lawyers take those laws and argue them in court cases,” Dawson said. “The students would get an in-depth look into what being a lawyer is like, how laws and policies are created and how they have changed over time.

“That course will be for our 11th and 12 graders,” she added. “We also want to add some new electives as the years go on. We want our kids to have a plethora of opportunities for them as they choose their different pathways at Bodine.”

When students aren’t in their classes or college-preparatory programs, they’re participating in an array of extracurricular activities and sports. The school has over 30 clubs including debate, robotics, chess, anime, yearbook and art.

Bodine also has a plethora of partnerships that provide educational opportunities for students including Steppingstone Scholars.

“Steppingstone Scholars is a great program that helps our kids with college and career opportunities,” Dawson said. “One of the things that’s really great this year is that we have a Bodine partnership person come in, he’s through the VISTA program. He’s been able to connect us and reconnect us with a lot of partners that we had prior to the pandemic.

“We had our first monthly partnership meeting in December,” she said. “What we’re going to be doing moving forward is we’re going to have the partners come in and talk about their programs and some of the things they’re doing after school during the kids advisory period.

“We’re also going to have them do different presentations and some of them will be virtual as well,” she added. “We’re really trying to reconnect with our partners after 18 months.”

Adding to Robeson’s students’ enthusiasm is the high-caliber of teachers. Students appreciate the academic aptitude of their teachers as well as the personal investments they make in them.

“All of our teachers, support staff and climate support staff at Bodine are dedicated to our students,” Dawson said.

“They stay after school, they tutor our kids,” she added. “They go above and beyond making sure that our students have everything that they need. We really take pride in building relationships with our students.”

Dawson said what she wants students to take away from their experience at Bodine is how important it is to be a global citizen.

“I would hope that one of the things they’ll take away is how important it is to be a global citizen and how important it is to look outside of your community and also to help others,” she said.