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**F**or the five years before the PRIDE program began, Fort Meade High School had experienced an overall decline in school spirit and motivation due, in no small part, to more athletic competition losses than any school deserves. During this period, the Fort Meade teams won only 18 percent of the games in which they competed.

As the years progressed, an apathetic attitude seemed to grip everyone. Student morale continued to decline, resulting in an increase in absences, a decrease in student organization participation, and a prevailing negative attitude from everyone. It seemed to feed on itself.

During the annual fall planning meeting of our School Improvement Team (SIT), we were searching for something that could be done to stop our downward spiral. We decided to look at everything we had tried and anything that might help. We felt that there must be an answer somewhere. Education is about problem solving, and we were determined to make Fort Meade a better school.

We began our search at the heart of our education plan: our school's mission statement. We found it was written in educational jargon; it sounded good, but what did it mean? It was too long and too complicated to be useful. It lacked the simplicity necessary for everyone to understand it and get involved with helping make it a reality.

For whom was the mission statement

intended? If it was intended to satisfy someone's accreditation check list, then it was fine; but if its function was to be the guiding goal for our school community, we needed to simplify it and make it something everyone could work with and toward. After hours of searching for the purpose of a school, our new mission statement became:

### **Ft. Meade High School Has PRIDE!**

**Personal  
Responsibility  
In  
Daily  
Effort**

So simple a word, yet we felt it was right at the heart of most of our problems. If we could get everyone to focus on PRIDE, we could make it more than a word: *it could become a predominant attitude!*

Moving from a written statement to a pervasive attitude took some careful planning and action. We were excited. We decided we needed a small, streamlined committee to begin setting up the PRIDE program while the SIT continued to work on its normal functions. We established a PRIDE committee and assigned the task of developing and implementing the PRIDE program with a budget of \$200. That was all the money we had!

Someone reminded us of those old adages: "what gets measured gets done"

and “you get from human beings what you reward.” We knew we needed to develop easy-to-administer systems to reward our students for the behavior we wanted Personal Responsibility In Daily Effort. We charged the committee with setting up an awards and rewards system for our students that emphasized the four areas on which we wanted to focus:

1. Appropriate academic responsibility/success
2. Student attendance
3. Student conduct
4. Effort

*We were on our way!*

### **Rewarding Effort with PRIDE**

When the PRIDE program was first introduced, it was considered a joke by many students. But as time went by everyone came to know what PRIDE meant, and understood that it was impossible to buy a lunch ticket without Principal Jodie Bailey asking, “what’s the good word?” or “what does PRIDE mean?”

Bailey says the program is particularly good for students who are neither academic achievers nor discipline problems: “It focuses on the 60 percent of the kids who are in the middle. These are the kids who walk down the hall everyday and never get recognized for anything good.”

By dealing with effort, conduct, absenteeism, and academic responsibility, the PRIDE Program is easily remembered by students and staff alike. Students need to know why they are receiving rewards if those rewards are going to change behavior. Success is rewarded

and students can progress to higher plateaus, as success becomes a part of his or her life. Like most schools, FMHS had existing reward programs for students and staff in place. A PRIDE umbrella was simply built over the other efforts and they all became a part of PRIDE. Fort Meade continued to reward honor roll students even though they are usually self motivated; but the beauty of the PRIDE program is that now there are more honor roll students at our school.