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## PENNWEST TAKES LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO LOCAL HIGH SCHOOLS



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PennWest University is engaging regional high school and middle school students through Leadership on the Road, a new outreach initiative launched in December 2025 to support leadership development and strengthen connections between PennWest and local schools.

As part of the program, Melissa Dunn, director of student development at PennWest, recently spent two days at Iroquois High School working with the school's Student Lighthouse Team — a group of student leaders in grades seven through 12 focused on developing skills in initiative, collaboration, communication and balance.

During the visit, Dunn facilitated interactive sessions on personal leadership styles and team development, while also discussing how leadership experiences in high school can connect to opportunities available at PennWest University.

The sessions emphasized practical leadership skills, including how students introduce themselves and articulate their strengths, identify and build confidence in their individual skills, and form effective working groups by balancing different leadership styles rather than relying on a single personality type.

“Leadership development isn’t about where students ultimately enroll — it’s about helping them understand who they are, how they work with others, and how they can contribute in any environment,” Dunn said. “Those skills are valuable no matter what path a student chooses.”

The visit was coordinated with Kelly Drahushak, special programming coordinator at Iroquois High School, and Tom Sovisky, an Edinboro alumnus and social studies teacher. The Student Lighthouse Team also leads school-wide programming that shares leadership practices with their peers.

Leadership development plays an important role in preparing students to navigate academic, professional and civic environments. Early opportunities to assess strengths, communication styles and teamwork preferences help students build self-awareness and confidence that can support long-term success across a wide range of future academic and career paths.

“We spent time helping students think about how they present themselves, how to recognize their own skills, and how to work effectively with others who may lead differently,” Dunn said. “Strong teams aren’t built by having everyone think or lead the same way.”

Leadership on the Road reflects the same philosophy PennWest applies with its current students through ongoing leadership development opportunities.

“Leadership on the Road reflects the same approach we use on our campuses,” Dunn said. “Through programs like the PennWest Leadership Academy, Rising Leaders and our student ambassador programs, we focus on helping students understand their strengths, develop confidence and learn how to lead effectively in different environments.”

The Iroquois engagement marks the first of five high school visits planned this semester as part of Leadership on the Road. Upcoming Leadership on the Road visits are scheduled with General McLane and California Area school districts, with additional visits anticipated in the Clarion region.

The initiative is led through PennWest’s Office of Student Development and reflects the university’s commitment to leadership, collaboration and community engagement.

**Pictured:** Students at Iroquois High School in Erie, Pennsylvania, participated in Leadership on the Road training, offered by PennWest.