

Principal's Report to PTO 9.13.17

Last year, Mr. Lowrey and I discussed the creation of a diversity initiative which we called the ***ACE Initiative***. "ACE" stands for "Accept, Celebrate, and Elevate." This was communicated in at least one of my community emails, and I will publish the updated version on our Spring Avenue website under Parent Resources→Community Relations.

The ACE Initiative was driven by the 6th Grade Leadership Club, under the guidance of Mr. Lowrey, and they created powerpoint presentations or found suitable videos to promote understanding of diversity in the larger student body. These presentations were given on Fridays during Morning Kickoff. They focused primarily on two areas of diversity: cultural and special needs. The cultural presentations took the form of celebrating people from all different continents, focusing on people who had made significant contributions to society, such as authors, artists, athletes, scientists and political leaders. The special needs presentations were short videos to help students understand people of differing abilities, such as people with Down Syndrome, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy. We also celebrated the basic concept of the diversity of individuals with our "I AM" wall.

This year, we intend to continue this emphasis on promoting awareness and understanding of diversity, and to build upon the experiences of last year. We also intend to explore ways to incorporate two other key components into this initiative, namely tolerance and service.

As such, we are renaming the ACE Initiative to the ***ACES Initiative*** to incorporate the service component. The tolerance piece still fits nicely under the Accept, Celebrate, and Elevate ideas. ***I would like to convene a parent committee around this initiative to explore opportunities for students to have enriching experiences with respect to these ideas.*** Based on parent response, I will set dates for the meetings, with the first meeting sometime in October.

I have already taken a few steps along this road that I will share with you, but the journey is just beginning. In August, our social worker Mrs. Weiland and I met with a representative of The LeaderShop, which is a community-minded leadership program for high school students, housed at Lyons Township. We discussed ideas of having presentations/skits by the high school students at some of our Morning Kickoffs on Fridays, and the possibility of having some of these students conduct classroom-based workshops at certain times throughout the school year. I will be communicating with her again later this month to put some dates on the calendar based on the themes we will be focusing on this year with our students. These themes could include, but not be limited to, compassion, tolerance, diversity, and respect.

We also have things such as the Peace Pole on the north side of the building that has not been emphasized of late, but could be a great opportunity to promote tolerance and community.

What types of activities or projects could we do around something like that, that could be meaningful to our students? These are the types of ideas I would like to discuss further with the ACES parent committee.

On Monday, our assistant principal Ms. Hall and I met with Ms. Quinn and Mr. Hood from Gurrie to discuss expanded opportunities for community service at the elementary level. Ms. Quinn is a supervisor for Every Monday Matters group, whose focus is on community service projects. We discussed the possibility of sending some 5th and 6th Graders to some of their outside projects, such as making care packages for our troops. Additionally, we discussed the possibility of Spring Avenue conducting projects that supported their overall initiatives. For example, using the above care-package example, our younger students would not be able to participate in this, because they aren't tall enough to move the boxes at the facility! But what if they could do something that "helped" the overall cause? For example, younger students could write letters to soldiers to be included in the care packages. Another opportunity we discussed was the shoe drives that Gurrie has done in the past. One step of the process is sorting the shoes and tying them together in pairs. Elementary students could certainly do that, and could certainly feel gratified by their contributions to the overall success of the projects, even if they were too young to go "off-campus" in certain situations.

For these opportunities, I would like to emphasize the "hands-on" element of these projects. Last year, we raised almost \$1000 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation through our Penny Wars. That was fantastic, and we will still do that, but for the students, the act of generosity was financial rather than them doing actual *service*. Both aspects of generosity are important.

Another important piece that we discussed on Monday was providing the elementary students with positive feedback, either in the form of showing them videos about the various causes they are supporting, and/or having Gurrie students come down to the service clubs and thank the younger students for their contributions to the cause. I think having the older students validate the younger ones for their work will be very powerful.

For this overall initiative, I envision a combination of school-wide experiences incorporated into the school day for all students, and after school or lunch-time opportunities in the form of clubs. These could be After 3 opportunities or staff-supervised clubs. This will be determined by administration and in consideration of parent/teacher input. Certain opportunities already exist, such as the Leadership Club for 6th Graders. But the ACES Initiative will seek to expand these types of opportunities for more Spring Avenue students to have as part of their school experience. As I said on Curriculum Night, I would characterize our students as having kind and generous natures. Let's look for more and better ways to give them the resources and opportunities to cultivate this aspect of their character development.