

North RNC Meeting – April 29, 2013 – North Boulevard School, Pompton Plains, NJ

PRESENTATIONS:

Theunis Dey School – Laura Russomano, Kirsten Goeb, Laura Hoogstrate

Theunis Dey School in Wayne, NJ is a 2013 NJ School of Character and a National Finalist School. The presenters provided information on the school's "Go Green"



initiative, their "Party for the Planet" Best Practice, and their overall SECD Program which led them to state and national recognition. The Go Green initiative originally started out as an Eagle Scout Project to clean up the nature trails around the school. This effort gained momentum and resulted in a Promising Practice called "Party for the Planet." Laura Hoogstrate, Program Coordinator, introduced a short video about this practice showing the

involvement of families and community groups in the project. Participating groups included the National Honor Society from the high school, the Weis Ecology Center, Laurelwood Arboretum, NJEPA, recycling professionals, and a solar energy expert. This event was very successful and attended by an audience of 600 people. Dr. Laura Russomano, the school principal stressed the fact that the environmental concepts were infused in the school curriculum and integrated with the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education.

Heather Bobrowski, School Counselor, spoke about student involvement in the character education initiative in Theunis Dey School. She talked about the skills that were taught as part of classroom instruction stemming from participation in the DSACS Program out of Rutgers. She stressed the importance of having a set of district core values and a school-wide committee to infuse these core values throughout the school. Active parent involvement provides positive support for school-based initiatives. She gave an example of how each grade level in the school did research on different cultures to promote tolerance and understanding. Theunis Dey had their National Site Visit at the end of March and expects to hear about their possible status as a National School of Character soon.

Pequannock Valley School – Richard Hayzler, Paul DePinto

Pequannock Valley Middle School is an Honorable Mention School of Character in 2013. The school was a State School of Character and National Finalist in 2006. After an introduction by School Principal Richard Hayzler, Paul DePinto, Assistant Principal, spoke about the school's efforts at student involvement centered on "Project Panther" which is an initiative connected with the school's participation in the YEA Youth Summit sponsored by the United



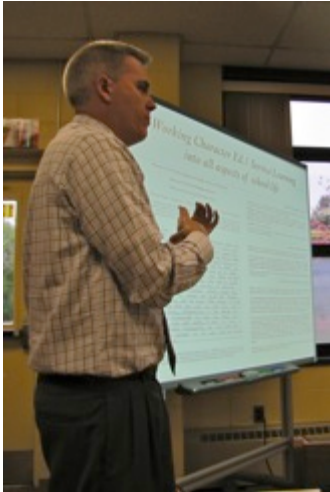
Way of Northern New Jersey.

Mr. DePinto went on to discuss the building-wide goal of “Fostering Respect” – not as an add-on program, but as the foundation for building relationships within the school. He asserted that the success of school rules depend on relationships, getting to know students, and celebrating success. He reiterated the importance of building personal relationships with students as a means of connection and engagement. PV has established the “Six Pillars” as the core values of the school and these values are infused through the work of the six Professional Learning Communities in the school. PV’s implementation of PLCs is based on the DuFour Model and has been recognized as a best practice, state-of-the-art program by the State of New Jersey. PLCs allow faculty and staff to better know students and colleagues.

Curricular infusion starts with a Sixth Grade Study Skills course based on Character Education. Literature and reading also have a character education focus. The eighth grade service learning experience called “Take Action” gives every student the opportunity to make a difference (“Stuff the Bus” was used an example of how students became engaged in helping others.) Character is interwoven in the school’s discipline policies and practices and parents are contacted with positive news as well as being engaged as partners in behavioral problem solving.

Hanover Park Regional High School District – Chris Kelly & Tom Gaglione

Hanover Park is New Jersey’s first District of Character and a National Finalist. The regional district consists of two high schools who have both worked to infuse character education in the fabric of the school culture. District administrators have made a commitment to Character Education which has been embraced by the faculty and student body of each of the high schools. Chris Kelly, District Supervisor of Instruction, has led the charge which has centered primarily on Service Learning. Chris mentioned the importance of a character education program being “tangible” at the high school level and this was achieved in Hanover through their approach to service learning. The faculty received training from our own Eileen Dachnowicz, a recognized expert in the field. Dynamic teachers took up the charge and were at the core of a successful program.



Tom Gaglione, an art teacher at Hanover Park HS, was instrumental in a “Learn and Serve” Grant which provided funds for creating an outdoor classroom at the school. This project, a 2012 Promising Practice, involved students and community in creating the classroom program. Even though funding was cut in the second year of the project, community groups stepped up with donations and materials so that the project could be completed.

Through this and other projects, Hanover discovered the importance of student voice, community involvement, media presence, and reflection. Character Education is part of the district's mission statement and core values are integrated in the Student Code of Conduct. The district's web site shows the importance of character education in the overall school program with a "Character Education Spotlight" that focuses on kids.

Chris reported on a student survey asking, "Which Pillar of Character needs the most work in our schools?" Students at both schools ranked respect first and responsibility second. Chris mentioned several other programs which were transformative. At Whippany HS, "Pink-Out Day" (for breast cancer) was a tone-setting event. Students became totally involved in the effort. Chris also mentioned an initiative with Manasquan HS at the Jersey Shore. Manasquan has had a series of tragedies in their district with an inordinate number of student suicides compounded by devastation from Hurricane Sandy. Students from Hanover Regional put together a "Life is Good" Program and video to support the student body at Manasquan delivering a message a hope through the song "You're Not Alone." This was a very powerful experience for the students at both schools. It is easy to see why Hanover Park Regional is a District of Character!

East Hanover Middle School – Dr. Joe Ricca, Stacie Costello, Michael Calomino

East Hanover Middle School is another Honorable Mention School in 2013. Dr, Ricca,



Superintendent of Schools, began their presentation with the importance of creating a foundation for students of good character which will help to support further student growth at the high school level (East Hanover Middle School sends their students to the Hanover Park Regional High School District.) Dr. Ricca also spoke to the importance of support from the top in creating a positive school culture and climate. It is obvious

that he provides that support for the schools in East Hanover.

Stacie Costello, Principal of the Middle School talked about how the district's anti-bullying team created a program called "Community Night of Respect" during the annual Week of Respect in October. The first year (Oct 2011) this event focused on compliance with the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Legislation. Activities for students and parents were scheduled for this event. In Year Two (October 2012), the focus was on empathy. Students prepared a skit called "Bystander- A Portrait in Apathy" based on the work of Jillian Palmieri. They did this skit in assemblies for the various grade levels which were followed by break-out sessions so the students could reflect on what they had seen. The students were very attentive and definitely moved by the experience. This program was repeated during the Night of Respect and provided a very powerful experience for all, serving as conversation starter about the problem of bullying and disrespectful behavior. Dr. Ricca also mentioned a program called "Don't Be a Zebra" which he felt was also a very powerful approach to bystander behavior.

Michael Calomino talked about the ROOTS Program out of Princeton University that seeks to scientifically identify students who are the “prime movers” in the school. East Hanover MS was selected to participate in this program which focuses on student voice and influence and asks them what they would like to see changed in the school. Michael reported that their participation thus far has been very positive, but that funding has not been secured by ROOTS to continue the program in 2013-14. Time will tell.

Macopin Middle School – Mary Reinhold, Marc Citro, Joe Trentacosta

Macopin Middle School in West Milford is the third middle school in our area to be an Honorable Mention School. Mary Reinhold, Macopin’s Principal, provided some historical background on Character Ed initiatives at Macopin. She spoke about connections with the OLWEUS Program at the start of CE in the school and the advisory program as a mainstay of the program today. She chose to focus on the “MAC” (Make A Change) Club as being a vehicle to promote student voice in the school. This club was started by two energetic and dynamic teachers who created this as a Persuasive Writing Club. An example of the work of the club is “Give a Goat” Night where teachers and club members design an activities night for students to raise funds to donate goats to communities in South America. This year, an



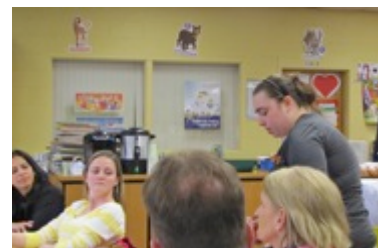
additional goal was to raise funds for Hurricane Sandy victims in West Milford where there was significant damage from high winds causing extended power outages throughout the community. Additionally, the club collected school supplies to be shared with schools in Paterson, NJ. This club has received much positive press and has been recognized by the West Milford Town Council.

Marc Citro, Assistant Principal, talked about a program called “Operation Thank-You” which reaches out to our servicemen overseas. Students create care packages for members of the military which are shipped out to former students who are in the military. The students also participate in the “Giving Tree”, “Little Angels” and “Stuff the Bus” programs during the holidays to help local families in need. Members of the school’s Student Council bring these initiatives to every classroom.

Joe Trentacosta, the District Anti-Bullying Coordinator provided some information on Macopin’s advisory program which has been in operation for the past three years. Joe has taken on the task of “re-evaluating what we do from scratch while focusing on core values.” He said that students are involved in doing this, answering the question, How do students choose, reflect on, and share what they have done in Character Education.”

North Boulevard School, Theodore Loeffler, Alexis Somers

North Boulevard School, a 2012 NJ and National School of Character, won a Promising Practice in 2012 for their “Colors Program” centering on Autism Awareness. Alexis Somers, a lead teacher in the Autistic Program



called “SNAPP” provided information on Autism Awareness and strategies. She reminded the group that Autism is a spectrum disorder which can be characterized by delayed speech, maladaptive social skills, and repetitive behaviors. She also provided some information on Applied Behavior Analysis which is an educational strategy used in Pequannock’s Autism classes.

Alexis described the “Colors Program (All Children Blend Together)” – a “reverse inclusion” program where fifth grade students could volunteer to spend time each day with the students in the autism program to serve as positive role models as they interact with the autistic students. Alexis also mentioned other autism awareness activities including an Luminaries program as well as inviting guest speakers and readers to work with students and parents. (One of the parents wrote a book called “Autism Dad” and he has been a speaker in the district to promote autism awareness.) The Colors Program has been a win-win for all concerned at North Boulevard School.

Oxford Central School, Pat Carr

Oxford Central School is a Pre-K to 8 School in Western New Jersey that was a 2012 Honorable Mention School of Character. Pat Carr, a special education teacher at the school has been active in leading the Character Education efforts at the school for the past six years. She reported on the school’s Promising Practices, including “Root Man” and the “Total Character Workouts” Program. Pat also serves as the NJASECD Secretary on the Board of Trustees.



Oxford Central participated in a project at Rutgers where NJ Schools of Character served as mentor schools for those aspiring to build effective character education programs. Oxford worked with Pequannock Valley School as part of this project from 2007-8 through 2009-10. “Root Man” served as the vehicle that helped Oxford determine its essential core values with those values being the roots of development for students and adults. The Root Man project started with the faculty of the school and moved to the students with variations according to age appropriateness. This project resulted in the identification of C.O.R.R.E.C.T. (Courage, Optimism, Respect, Responsibility, Empathy, Citizenship, Trustworthiness) as the core values of the school.

Since this first initiative, Oxford has functioned as a committee of the whole when it comes to character education, although Pat confides that she comes up with many ideas during her long commute to school each day. The Parent Teacher Association and community leaders have also been quite supportive of the efforts in character education at the school. Oxford learns from other schools in adapting programs to fit the needs of the building. They borrowed an idea from Lawrenceville (RACER Program) to create the “CORRECT Crusaders”, a group of superheroes who exemplify the seven character traits.

In an effort to involve the whole school community in Character Education activities, the school created a program called “Total Character Workouts” designed to “strengthen your character education muscles.” The workouts are led by “Kid Courageous” and

fellow crusaders "Cousins Optimism, Respect and Responsibility" the schools very own superheroes as the students and staff "stop, drop, and work out!"

Pat also shared information about other initiatives including a "Talk it, Walk it, and Pass it on" Campaign, inter-grade activities, a school song based on character traits which was created by students with the help of a professional song writer during an assembly program, and "Ask Me About ___" stickers which help to prompt conversations about character at home. Oxford Central School recognizes that character education and improvement of school culture is not a destination but a continuous journey that creates a safe, encouraging learning environment which helps students do their best both during and after the school day is over.

Randolph High School, Evy Falcon-Duran, Kirsten Goeb. Martel Roberts

Randolph School District has been involved in character education through the



"Respectful Schools" initiative at the High School and DSACS at the Middle School. Results on student surveys indicated that many students did not feel connected, so staff members created a promising practice called "Making Homeroom Count." This project used Homeroom as a vehicle to promote connections between staff and students. Guidance and CST are included in this initiative and Support staff have been recognized by the homeroom activities. Teachers have the opportunity to use the six minutes of homeroom to get to know their students and empower students to get involved. Kirsten Goeb, one of today's presenters, used trivia in her homeroom to build connections and was surprised at how easily students became engaged, even when the subject was Walt Disney trivia.

Evy Falcon-Duran reported on several other programs at Randolph High School that had a strong impact. "Rachel's Challenge" (Rachel was one of the students who was killed at Columbine HS) did an assembly program at Randolph which led to a Random Acts of Kindness Program as well as the founding of a student club which came up with many ideas for activities to engage students in the school. These included random snacks before testing and chain links throughout the year. An ongoing Spirit Week program has been enhanced to support positive collaborations between the classes, and a "R+A+M=S" Program was also created to engage students in core values (the school mascot is a ram). The experience at Randolph thus far indicates that these programs have helped to energize the student body and increase the overall feeling of connectedness with the school.

Discussion – Future Activities of the Center

A brief discussion was held surrounding future activities of the North RNC. Several attendees felt that showcasing programs that have been successful in area schools is very valuable. We are also open to accepting topic ideas for professional development concerning school culture and climate. Please send any suggestions to Bill Trusheim (william.trusheim@gmail.com).

East Hanover Middle School expressed an interest in hosting a future meeting of the Northern RNC. We will set that up for some upcoming meeting of the group. If other schools would be interested in hosting, it would be great to see how work on character education has had a positive impact on your schools. Again, let Bill Trusheim know if you would like to host a meeting.

“For the Good of the Order”

The Board of Trustees is scheduled to meet on May 31 at 1 PM at NJPSA in Monroe Township. All members of NJASECD are invited to attend to view the proceedings – only members of the board are allowed to vote on matters concerning the organization.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7 PM.