“Diversity Pole” Exhibit Highlights Individualism
Newark High School students and staff returning from the recent two-week holiday break were greeted near the front doors by the new “Diversity Pole” art exhibit.

It’s seven wooden stakes on which signs, in various shapes and colors made by students in the Multicultural English 12 and Mixed Media art class students, are affixed. A contrast against the stark wintry landscape, the exhibit represents the students’ diverse perceptions of themselves _ their individual identities.

NHS art teacher Renee Bailey teaches the Mixed Media art class and co-teaches the new-this-school-year Multicultural Studies English 12 Class with NHS English teacher Danielle Ohlson that allows students to creatively integrate art and history into English.

Bailey said students made their signs during the three-week art unit on Diversity to “represent and symbolize who they are and what they stand for.”

“They could use lines, shapes, colors, type, and imagery to show off their multifaceted lives,” Bailey explained. “However, even if you just see a word, realize that there is more behind the word. The student had to think about the symbolism for their choices, which could be obvious or subtle. And that wasn’t easy since each student has a story to tell and not a single story. They also had to consider how they could aptly present their story on a sign and how each would relate to the groups which reflect our Diversity. They had to ask themselves ‘Do they work well together _ co-exist and thrive despite differences and similarities? Can it be beautiful? Should we celebrate it?’”

Like Bailey, Ohlson said the sign-making process was not a simple task.

“It was difficult because it required reflection,” she said. “In my opinion, in today’s society we do not engage enough in the very critical act of self-reflection.”

“We know from these classes our diversity is beautiful and we celebrate it each day with these artists. Feel free to ask them about their sign to learn a little bit more about them,” Bailey said.

Students whose signs are on display are: Alison Avery, Owen Adams, Chyanne Carithers, McKenna Kersten, Sarah Lape, Cameron McAllister, Nicholas Bernardi, McKenna Briggs, Blade Case, Jada Emanuel, Nyezeir Garcia, Tajhmere Greene, Kendrick Logins, Anthony Wright, Isabelle Fanning, Zoe Fisher, Alyssa Gunkel, Jasmine Johnson, Lauren MacTaggart, Kamryn Reyome, Emily Spry and Deborah Szarek. Here are a few students’ thoughts about the project.

McAllister: “Personally, I didn’t find this project particularly difficult, but I found it valuable because it shows the untold stories about what makes us diverse. While we can see what makes us different physically, this project showed the internal aspects of who we really are.”

Avery: “In my diversity pole project, one thing that challenged me was that I wanted to make it a simple sign, yet one that still described me in many ways. It was difficult to narrow it down to just one image. However, since I am an artist, and have been for a long time, I was able to come up with my idea. I’m not a planner when it comes to art. I like to just do it and see what comes together, even though in the art world, I am told that is the "wrong way" to do it. What made this project so valuable, is that I got to practice my art skills along with thinking deeper about how I am diverse (from others).”

Kersten: “I mostly had fun with my project, because it was my "Weenacorn." There wasn't a lot of pressure for this project, so I felt that I could let go and have fun with it. Looking at the final product made me feel happy, and that is what's important to me.”
The exhibit will remain on display until the end of this school year and will be changed next year after new Multicultural English 12 and Mixed Media art class students complete the sign-making assignment.