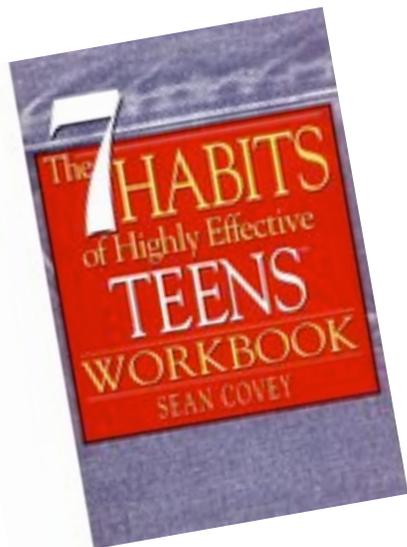




Student leaders greeted Newark Middle School teachers as they came back to the school during the Superintendent's Conference Day August 31st and then marched around the building to welcome teachers that may have come in other doors. It was a great way to welcome everyone!

Student Leader Component Compliments PBIS Program



Newark Middle School took an important first step last year in trying to change the school culture by implementing a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program with the introduction of Sean Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens" to all students.

The decision was an outgrowth of a meeting last summer NMS Principal Teresa Prinzi held with a group of teachers to work on the school's Plan For Excellence.

Discussion about strengths and areas of need in the building, based on data and staff and parent surveys, indicated students' social and emotional skills needed bolstering.

"After much discussion and reflection, the group felt that if we could take time to teach students skills necessary to make decisions, create and maintain positive relationships, then we could make a positive shift in the culture and climate of the Middle School," Prinzi recalled.

Danielle Ohlson, 7th grade ELA teacher suggested a book she was given, and really liked called “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens” by Sean Covey, might be just the ticket.

After researching another school district’s successes using Covey’s book and determining sustainable results could only be achieved by establishing a consistent and pervasive program, Prinzi and the teachers talked about what would be needed to make this an integral part of the Middle School culture.

“Time. We needed devoted time to this program. Not just time to plan, but consistent time to teach and work with the students on the skills,” Prinzi recalled. “As an administrator one of the most important things you are aware of and keep track of is instructional time. But the passion that was generated around the need for this program was immense and the potential outcome was equally immense. So, we took a leap and said ‘Let’s do it!’ 15 minutes every day was set aside for the instruction of ‘7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.’ We established that this would be uninterrupted time. Students would be arranged in small PBIS groups of 10-12 students and without fail we would have this class. And so began our journey.”

Prinzi said a core group of teachers began to meet weekly to plan the lessons for the entire building and little by little more hands were pitching in – finding video links, stories, activities and ways to build on ideas and concepts being taught.

“While we initially began with books just for the teachers, we were then able to purchase books and folders for all of the students. We added building assemblies at which teachers acted out skits to demonstrate the habits and teach skills. Proactive Man and Quadrant Girl were born! We identified the building Big Rocks – Academic Achievement, Opportunities, Safe Behavior and Respect: Every adult is my teacher & every student is my student. We celebrated these at building-wide assemblies each quarter recognizing academic success, and students participating in various opportunities (musical, sports, clubs etc.) We talked about building expectations for a safe building. We created opportunities for students to have a role in the assemblies and continued to encourage students to take a lead with them. We extended our 15 minute morning sessions a few times during the year for students to participate in team building activities. And because every teacher in our building was involved in the “7 Habits” lessons, the language was being utilized in classroom instruction. Likewise, students were making connections with the “7 Habits” skills and real life classroom experiences.”

Prinzi said as the year progressed, the core group of teachers researched schools participating in the “7 Habits” and reached out to them to gain ideas in an effort to expand the NMS program. Students were surveyed at both mid-year and the end of the school year to provide feedback on the program.

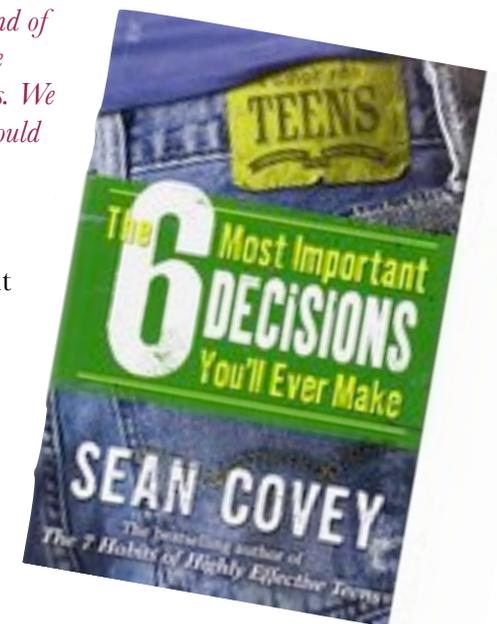
“These surveys were reviewed and adjustments were made to meet the needs of our students,” Prinzi continued. “And at the end of the year, we celebrated that we conducted a” 7-Habits” lesson every day!!! What a huge accomplishment! When reflecting on where we wanted to go from here we discussed the desire to have student voice and the need for the program to evolve at the 7th and 8th grade levels. We reached out to Middle School faculty and Kelley School fifth grade teachers and asked them to recommend students who they believed would be responsible student leaders. We ended our year feeling really good about what we were able to accomplish for our students.”

Hence the PBIS initiative has been expanded for this upcoming school year.

Sixth graders will experience the “7-Habits” for the first time. Seventh graders will build on what they learned last year and eighth graders will learn lessons from another one of Covey’s books, “The 6 Most Important Decisions You’ll Ever Make.”

“All of these learning opportunities will help to provide our students with the tools they need to make informed and wise decisions, build common expectations and independence, Prinzi said. “We believe that these tools will help to empower students to achieve academic success as well as grow socially and emotionally in a safe environment.”

Student leaders, at all three grade levels, have also been incorporated this year based on what the core group of teachers observed last spring in the Pal-Mac school district.



“We decided it was important for kids to have an active role, ownership and a voice in helping to promote a positive school culture,” explained Ohlson, who is a member of the core group of teachers that also includes 6th and 8th grade social studies teacher Lisa Eakins; 6th grade math teacher Jason Dentel; 7th and 8th grade French teacher Robin Newcomer; 7th and 8th grade Spanish teacher Courtney Ormsby, 6th and 8th grade science teacher Kim Saccardi and 7th and 8th grade Spanish teacher Marci Mason.

“Developing leadership skills in our students is an essential life skill. It is important for students to see themselves as leaders,” Eakins said.

The main role of the 41 student leaders _ recommended by teachers last spring and selected based on an application process _ will be to assist teachers in helping to teach and motivate other students during the 15-minute PBIS sessions first thing each morning at which students learn and practice the habits in Covey’s books.

They will also have an important voice and role in planning PBIS assemblies and other activities throughout the school year.

The student leaders also assisted in various ways during the recent 6th grade Locker Night August 29th and welcomed teachers back to NMS on Superintendent’s Conference Day August 31st.

To gear up for their assignments this year, they participated in team building and communication skill bolstering activities August 16th. They worked with the core group of teachers who planned the event.

One of the team building exercises was working together to group six plastic cups into a pyramid using only a rubber band with four strings attached to it. They also delved into various scenarios that helped them explore different ways a person can be a leader and the obstacles they might face.

Part of the four-hour event also included having lunch with Superintendent Matt Cook; Ed Gnau, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Krista Lewis, Assistant Superintendent For Curriculum and Instruction, Jen Singer, NCSD’s Director of Pupil Services; Prinzi and Assistant Principal Greg Herbst; and Claudia Birrittella, the new NMS school psychologist.

Students sat in small groups with the various invited guests at tables and asked them questions in order to get to know them better and practice communication skills with adults _ all while snacking enjoying pizza and cookies.

Prinzi said the informal luncheon provided students with a relaxed opportunity to learn to ask questions and

get to know someone else _ skills they will have plenty of opportunity to utilize during the upcoming school year.

“I really enjoyed sitting down with a group of highly motivated students to have a mature conversation over lunch,” Herbst said. *“The students who are striving for leadership in this program are well rounded and very sharp. They are building the skills that are needed to catapult them into future leadership opportunities. They will certainly drive positive initiatives in our school!”*



“Greg is right,” Cook said. “Too often in education, we make decisions about students without talking to students. Almost always, we could do better if we include their voice. The Middle School Student Leadership Group is a great step in the right direction and perfectly aligns with our school vision. Thanks to all the MS staff that have helped to make all of this a reality.”

Ohlson echoed the entire core group’s sentiments when she said they are really pleased with how well the initiative went last year and that the momentum is building.

“We surveyed all students at the end of this last school year and were so pleased to hear that a majority of them expressed that they enjoyed the 15-minute PBIS sessions each morning. Many said it had a centering and calming effect on them and it was a great way to start the day by participating in activities not attached to academics, but helping them with life problem solving and coping mechanisms.”

“This is the most energizing work I’ve ever been involved in during my career,” Ohlson continued.

And she thanked Prinzi for have the foresight to allow the first 15 minutes of each school day to be devoted entirely to PBIS activities.

“This does support academics by addressing students’ social and emotional issues,” Ohlson continued. “It is very exciting work and it’s very valuable.”

Eakins also noted that at the end of the workshop August 16th, student leaders voted on a T-shirt design and slogan for their group. The winning design was developed, working with Arcadia Sports, by eighth grader Kalyna Bryant. The slogan on the shirt is an African proverb: *“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”*

Members of Middle School Student Leadership Group include: sixth graders: Damien Matthys, Hannah Kinslow, Kellyn Pettine, Holly Dayton, Jose Venture, Brayden Steve, Raeshawn Howard, Rebecca Spry, Ryan Mack, Preston Steve, Erica Rieke, Anna Verdine, Carlos Bueso, Ariana Newark, Kathryn Verdine, Noah Garland, Natalie Kent, Taylor Oliver, Peyton DeBoerdere, Sara George and Tariq Joseph. Seventh graders: Emma Kuhn, Isabelle Fanning, Ashley Jacques, Sam Camacho, Natalie Kelley, Cody Acquista, Jenna Havert, Gabby McGavisk, Alicia Austin, Ben Fisher, Devina Bueg, Gabby Taylor and Stevie Brown. And eighth grade leaders: Tyhiera Streeter, Haley Miller, Ryan Hermanet, Deontae Tarver, Emma Robbins, Chris Wheaton and Kalyna Bryant.

Thanks to Lisa Eakins and
Teresa Prinzi for
providing photos!