

Superintendent's Update

Karen L. Bilbao, Superintendent of Schools

It's Okay to Be Different Encourages Kindergartners' Acceptance of Others



Mary Pat Harrington, and special guest Laraine Gaunt, teach Mrs. Massell's kindergarten students about their five senses during the *It's Okay to Be Different* Program at Bayview Elementary School.

The award winning *It's Okay To Be Different Program* has been adopted as a special curriculum rotation in our now, full-day kindergartens this year. The program's objective is to engender an acceptance among our youngest students of people with various disabilities.

It's Okay To Be Different operates under the premise that by demystifying differences, answering curious questions and alleviating fear, acceptance will grow. The program is introduced to the young children with engaging and entertaining literature and lessons emphasizing the many ways in which we are different. Several weeks are spent on exploring the five senses necessary to develop the background knowledge to understand the different disability areas including: visual and hearing impairments; physical, learning and developmental disabilities. Explorations of the disability begin with a meaningful story read aloud to the children, where the story hero has a particular disability. Hands-on sessions are conducted where children experience the actual disability in a non-threatening and fun scenario. Guest speakers with the disability are invited to the classroom. For example, a visually impaired person will bring his

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Significant Strides Achieved in Reducing Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse

Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Personnel, David M. Healy, recently presented the annual report of Violence and Vandalism to the Board of Education, which showed a remarkable 35% decline in the total number of incidents reported of Violence, Vandalism, Weapons and Substance Abuse. The all-inclusive statistic fell from 315 for the 2007-2008 school year to 204 for the 2008-2009 school year.

"This drop is all the more significant," Mr. Healy explained, "because Middletown gives an accurate report of data as

Random Drug and Alcohol Testing continues as a major deterrent to student drug use. Evidence supporting the program's success can be found in a comparison of the 2009 student survey with the original 2006 survey administered just prior to the establishment of the Random Drug Testing Program. The category of 'non-use by students throughout high school' showed a 10% increase in non-users. That is, our students self-reported that an additional 10% of the student population declined to use drugs as they continued through high school.

confirmed by state auditors, who have commended the way we aggressively report incidents to the state."

Decreases were experienced in practically every reported category, including simple assaults, harassment/intimidation/bullying, damage to property, theft, weapons possession (the latter category reflects only 3 incidents and none involving firearms). Substance abuse also showed a significant decline in the area of reported use with only 43 incidents compared to 95 the year before. One increase occurred in reported drug possession, moving from one to seven incidents from the year before.

Overall student discipline incidents for the 2008-2009 year showed a 32% decline representing 3,369 less incidents from the previous year. Discipline incidents include: late or cutting class, use

Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse Stats continued on back page

WE CONGRATULATE OUR NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARS



Pictured at a recent Board of Education meeting were Left to right (front row—David Fegley, Mariah Stewart, John Devine; second row—HSN Principal Patricia Cartier, Bryan Pinamonti, Kelley Kling, Cameron Allen, and HSS Interim Principal George Hart

We celebrate and congratulate our National Merit Semi-finalists Brian Pinamonti and Steven Rowe and our Commended Scholars Cameron Allen, Jake Brodsky, Christian Ciampi, John Devine, David Fegley, Sarah Grand, Margaret Gibbon, Kelley Kling, Taylor McCabe, Kyle McKnight and Mariah Stewart. The National Merit Semi-finalists scored within the top 1% of the 1.5 million high school students who took the PSAT in 2008. Semi-finalists can submit an application to become national merit finalists in competition for the 2010 merit scholarships. Commended scholars scored within the top 2.5% of the students that took the PSAT. They are also eligible to receive special scholarships from schools they have indicated interest in attending as well as from certain corporations and businesses. The National Merit Scholarship Program, an academic competition for recognition and scholarship, was founded in 1955. Students compete in the program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) and by meeting published program entry/participation requirements.

H1N1 Update

As of this writing, the Middletown Township Board of Health, in conjunction with the school district, will be offering the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine to all Middletown children at High School North and High School South after school hours and possibly on weekends sometime after November 9th. (HSS has been confirmed for Thursday, November 12th between 5 and 8PM.) No appointment is necessary. Parents need to sign consent forms to authorize vaccinations. Please see the website for additional information and to download consent forms. Consent forms will also be available at the vaccination sites. Updates will continue to be posted on the district website (www.middletownk12.org).

It's Okay to be Different continued

seeing-eye dog to answer children's questions and discuss his daily life experiences. Students from self-contained classrooms are mainstreamed into the kindergarten classes for these important lessons.

The program, which was awarded the Christa MacAuliffe Fellowship from the Department of Education, was developed by former Middletown special education teacher Laraine Gaunt who presented it at Navesink Elementary School for over 20 years. In her retirement, Mrs. Gaunt has presented the program to many other school districts and at various educational venues. Mary Pat Harrington, our sign language teacher, has studied the program under Mrs. Gaunt and has turn-keyed it for other teachers in the district at the Oct 19th Staff Development Day. We are very excited to have incorporated this very valuable program into our kindergarten curriculum so all our kindergarteners will reap its benefits.

Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse Stats continued



Members of the CORE Team, Middletown High School North SAC counselor, George Obermeier, Austin Academy Administrator James Homiak and Middletown Assistant Superintendent David Healy meet quarterly along with representatives of the Middletown police department, probation and community services to address problems particular to at-risk students.

of profanity, use of electronic devices, truancy, and smoking on school grounds.

Many proactive actions have led to this vast improvement:

- In the area of violence, vandalism, and theft, administration believes the installation of cameras to all five secondary schools have created a significant deterrent with identifying signage announcing the cameras' presence.
- The updating and revision of Intervention and Referral Service (I&RS) plans and procedures have aided our I&RS teams to better identify and address the needs of struggling and at-risk students for early intervention purposes.
- The creation of the Austin Academy has given students who cannot function well in the mainstream high school an in-community alternative in an environment that better meets their needs. The Austin Academy has also saved the district significant tuition costs since these students would have otherwise been sent to expensive out-of-district alternative schools.
- The two high schools continue to operate a Community Service Rehabilitation program, where infractions that would have resulted in out-of-school suspensions have offered a more positive and productive discipline alternative.
- Random Drug and Alcohol Testing continues as a major deterrent to drug use. Evidence supporting the program's success can be found in a comparison of the 2009 student survey with the original 2006 survey administered just prior to the establishment of the Random Drug Testing Program. The category of 'non-use by students throughout high school' showed a 10% increase in non-users. That is, our students self-reported that an additional 10% of the student population declined to use drugs as they continued through high school. The survey was professionally written to catch unreliable respondents, which are eliminated from the tallies.
- Finally, last year the Core Team was created to fortify communications and networking between the school district, police department, probation and community services to address problems particular to at-risk students. The Core Team meets quarterly.

While the school district is very happy with this year's decline in the reported statistics, which represent the hard work of staff and administration, Middletown continues to provide and increase programs that should help reduce these incidents further. To that end, the district continues to provide workshops for staff on violence, vandalism, gang awareness, internet safety, substance abuse signs and symptoms. This year, Middletown began the *It's Okay to be Different* program in the new, full-time kindergartens, to foster an acceptance for all people at a formative age. The bullying prevention program, *S.T.A.M.P. Out Bullying*, was started at the district's twelve elementary schools in the fall.

OPERATION MEDICINE CABINET TAKES PLACE NOVEMBER 14

Operation Medicine Cabinet is a national initiative designed to encourage the community to properly dispose of unused, unwanted and expired medicine. All residents can drop off prescription drugs at Middletown High School North, 63 Tindall Road and Middletown High School South, 900 Nut Swamp Road, from 10 a.m. to 2p.m. on Saturday, November 14. The program's intent is to deter abuse of prescription drugs. The event is hosted by the Middletown Township Police Department, in conjunction with the Middletown Township Board of Education and the Monmouth County High School Task Force.

