

Greenfield Elementary School

Grades PreK-5 • Public/Suburban • Beverly Hills, Michigan • Birmingham Public Schools

Learning and Living the Greenfield Way

To most students at Greenfield Elementary School in beautiful Beverly Hills, an affluent suburb 40 miles northwest of Detroit, lunch recess is the time to be kids—jumping, playing, rollicking kids. However, a group of fifth graders have chosen to forego this playtime for a higher calling: working with their little buddies in Lydia Moore’s autism class. Principal Don Tobe says, “Our fifth graders connect with these autistic students and sincerely love and care for them.”



Learning and living the Greenfield Way is the heart of the school’s character education program, which emphasizes respect, responsibility, and kindness. Driving the Character Education Committee are two dynamic co-chairs: Claudia St. Amour, counselor, and Lydia Moore, pre-school teacher for students with autism. When the Birmingham district mandated character education in its Strategic Plan of 2001, Greenfield readily obliged. However, the school’s program really

ignited in 2006, when St. Amour and Moore returned from the CEP Forum with new ideas and new enthusiasm. Moore explains, “Attending the national conference gave us the direction that we needed. The Eleven Principles guided the establishment of the program.” The two crusaders quickly converted the rest of the staff, and 17 of the school’s 25 professionals now serve on the Character Education Committee. School secretary Joan Crampton adds, “Their wonderful passion spreads, and we’re like sponges soaking it up.”

Jamerah, a fifth grader who transferred to this school in the middle of fourth grade, says, “As a new student, everybody was nice to me. Everybody in this school just knows the Greenfield Way and follows it.” St. Amour, whom the students call “the character teacher,” visits each of the classes and guides the students in developing social skills and handling conflicts. Both class meetings and class instruction reinforce the values. For example, students in Lindsay Bouchard’s fifth-grade class meeting participate in a Walk and Talk session in which partners discuss worries and problems that have been submitted anonymously by their peers.

Character issues frequently arise in language arts and social studies lessons. Students point out how characters in their reading observe these values, or they may choose historical figures that they wish to emulate.

Parents are enthusiastic in their support of the Greenfield Way and appreciate that St. Amour has addressed parent meetings to explain it to them. PTA president Anne McNarney, mother of a third-grade daughter, says: “It is so great that the teachers blend it



THE PRINCIPAL’S CORNER:

Donald E. Tobe

ADVICE TO THOSE NEW TO CHARACTER EDUCATION:

Trust and follow the Eleven Principles. They will allow any staff to develop a systematic and organized plan for character education. They will affirm positive activities already existing in your building and guide your plans for growth and improvement. Always remember that character education is substance, not glitz.

[character education] right in with the regular subjects. The students are given character tools for life.” Judge Steven Whalen, with children in third and fifth grades, says, “It’s very much like a family here,” and notes that the school “nurtures,” very much “as a family would.” The same idea resonates in the comments made by second-grade teacher Lisa Arnold: “We’re all like family and friends with each other. . . . It’s so important to establish a relationship with each child. We do it by being good role models, by listening, by having empathy.” The effect of the Greenfield Way continues long after the students have left the school. Deputy Superintendent Paul DeAngelis says the middle school staff can tell immediately which students come to them from Greenfield. “They are bringing a skill set that’s well ingrained.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Claudia St. Amour, Elementary Counselor
Greenfield Elementary School
31200 Fairfax Avenue
Beverly Hills, MI 48025

Telephone: (248) 203-3211
E-mail: cs03bps@birmingham.k12.mi.us
Web site: www.birmingham.k12.mi.us/Schools/Elementary/Greenfield