

Herman K. Ankeney Middle School

Grades 6–8 • Public/Suburban • Beaver Creek, Ohio • Beaver Creek City Schools

Reaching Out and Involving Everyone

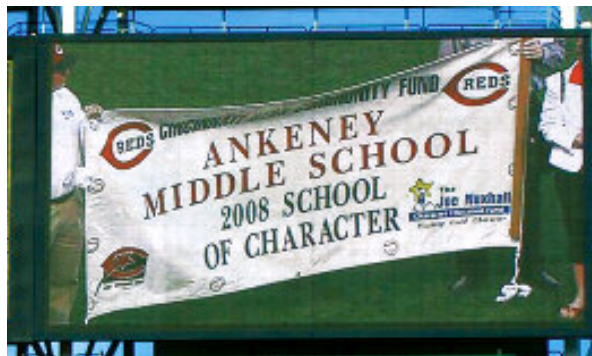
Just mention Ankeney Middle School at any gathering in Beaver Creek, Ohio, and someone is bound to say, “Oh, I worked on their character education mural.” Over 2,500 individuals, ranging in age from two to 91—teachers, administrators, support staff, students, families, board members, senior citizens, community members—joined hands to create a dazzling mural that dominates the school’s main foyer. Composed of 3,000 hand-made tiles, this impressive mosaic depicts a charger (Ankeney student) armed with a shield (emblazoned with six pillars of character education) on his quest to the castle (the high school). When the school’s Character Education Committee sought a project to unify the school, this mural, the brainchild of art

teacher Melissa Clark, seemed a natural. Not only did it involve the community as a partner, but it also emphasized how the school uses the six pillars of respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, citizenship, and caring to prepare the Ankeney student for his upward journey.

If the mural and the pillars that decorate all hallways and classrooms serve as visual proof of the school’s commitment to character education, four school-wide events set these values in action: a Character Kick-Off that promotes them at the beginning of the year, a “Mix It Up” Lunch (meeting new people), a Red Ribbon Week (drug-free programs), and a Character Counts Week (a host of activities). It is in the

daily advisories, however, that the school has made the greatest inroads in helping students understand and reflect on what it means to be a person of character. Students, meeting daily in groups of 14 to 18 with a teacher for 20 minutes, have an opportunity to participate in activities that reinforce the pillars and discuss moral and ethical issues.

Ankeney’s is not a top-down character education program coming from the administration. Although Principal Pam Taiclet is its vibrant advocate, there is an incredible amount of buy-in from the staff and students. The Character Education Committee, consisting of 21



members representing all disciplines and support services, is clearly teacher driven. Student leadership is also an integral part. Language arts teacher Nancy Ritzi, who has guided the development of the program, observes, “Kids are really taking ownership of character education and internalizing it.” Peer helpers assist in two multi-handicapped classrooms, working one-on-one with students. WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) students mentor incoming sixth graders, visit their advisories, and build relationships. Eighth grader Krista says of the experience, “You get to meet new kids and work with the sixth graders. It’s like being a big sister.” Amanda, also an eighth grader, adds, “Ankeney gives the



THE PRINCIPAL’S CORNER:

Pam Taiclet

ADVICE TO THOSE NEW TO CHARACTER EDUCATION:

Character education becomes a belief or philosophy of your building after years of hard work and dedication. It is not an overnight process and cannot be viewed as a program or extra-curricular activity. Start slow, and bring staff and families on board.

kids loads of ways to shine and to make connections with others.” John, who arrived at Ankeney from Germany in sixth grade, sums up the Ankeney spirit: “The school reaches out to you and involves you.”

Parents and community members also contribute to the program’s success. Bambi Saxe, the parent of a seventh-grade daughter and two sons in tenth and eleventh grades, admits that she was apprehensive at first about her children entering the middle school but found the new environment “very nurturing”: “Parents don’t feel disconnected here. . . . It’s comforting. Everybody at this school is committed to the program. Character education *is* the school.”

REFERENCE

CHARACTER COUNTS! Los Angeles, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics. Web site: www.charactercounts.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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