

# Beechview program, class help pupils celebrate heritage

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

At the beginning of the school year, 10 foreign students with zero English skills attended their first session of the Multi-age/Multi-cultural Classroom, a pilot program at Beechview Elementary School in Farmington Hills.

Three months later, they wrote and read stories - in English - about their homelands and journeys to the United

States, during the recent "Heritage Celebration" in the school gymnasium. The celebration wasn't just put on by the newcomers.

Also participating were 22 so-called "mainstream" students, who voluntarily joined the program, said Michele Meyers. She teaches the class of fourth- and fifth-graders along with language instructor Fay Kinaya for the entire year, while students learn enough English to join regular classes next year.

One of the newcomers, Noor Abood of Iraq, read her story to district administrator Don Cowan during the program. Although she spoke in broken English, he was quite impressed. "She did quite well," Cowan said. "Assuming she didn't have any English skills before she got here, that's quite an accomplishment."

Cowan called the celebration a "clear example" of the diversity in Farmington Public Schools. "It was very warming to see ...

The pride and joy they had in showing off their work. It just jumped out at you."

According to Meyers, the newcomers - who attend Beechview from other parts of the district - didn't just write about their first impressions of America. They also brought in music, food and other artifacts that represented the cultures left behind.

"And the mainstream kids did the same thing," Meyers said. "They talked about their whole heritage as far back as they could go."

The Beechview gymnasium was lined with tables and booths, with students displaying their montages and family trees about countries such as Russia, Japan and Albania.

Even the "mainstream" students who have lived here for years were excited to study their family roots and share what they learned during the "Heritage Celebration," said parent Nancy Britten.

In the Multi-age/Multi-cultural Classroom itself, Meyers said students get the district's regular curriculum in addition to studying different cultures every marking period. Mexico and Japan have already been studied; coming up soon are units about Germany and the Middle East.

Cowan said he could not guarantee that the pilot program will become a permanent fixture in the district. But he sounded optimistic that it would at least be offered again in 1998-99.

"My guess is we would extend it," he said.

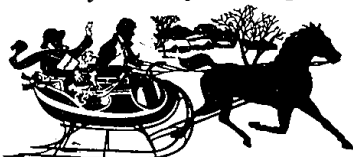
Beechview is the only school in the district currently offering a multi-age/multi-cultural program.



Proud presenters: Above, during the recent "Heritage Celebration" at Beechview Elementary School, "newcomer" Noor Abood reads story to district administrator Don Cowan about her journey to America. At left, student Christopher Britten talks about the Ukraine with teacher Dave Workman.



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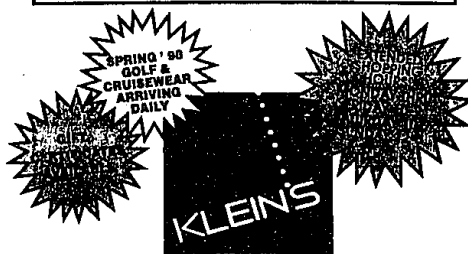
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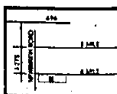
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