

Students honor King's legacy

**By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER**

A march it wasn't. But the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were still cause for much celebration Monday in Farmington Public Schools, albeit in low-key fashion.

Students throughout the district spent much of the plain civil rights leader's birthday celebration talking about things that King stood for during his life—peace, understanding and kindness to others.

The famous "I Have a Dream" speech echoed over the public address systems at Beechview and William Grace elementary schools, and probably at the other buildings as well. Teachers are spending classroom time discussing King's contributions to mankind. But the tributes aren't just words.

At Beechview Elementary, in an effort spearheaded by the student council, bulletin boards feature construction paper "helping hands" or "footsteps," containing handwritten examples of how students are doing their best to get along with others.

Down one hallway is the "Helping Hands" bulletin board. Yellow construction paper hands surround a thoughtful portrait of King. Inscribed on each is an example of how a student was kind to one another, for no reason. They are simply called random acts of kindness.

Lash Orlovski "helped Danny with his spelling."

Danny Gaylor "shared his new crayons with Heather."

Laura Gaines "apologized without being asked."

Marc Holmes "found some money and he tried to find the owner."

Angela Del Piero "helped Heather when she was hurt."

Follow leader

Another hallway features a bulletin board inspiring students to "Follow in the Footsteps" of Dr. King.

According to Beechview principal Norma Jean Sasse, the school's goal is for every student to have an entry on one of the bulletin boards by the end of January, which is Cultural Awareness Month in the district.

"It's most important how you treat others," said Sasse, referring to King's teachings. "It's about peace, love and helping one another. And that's what the bulletin boards (are) about. We want to act like him."

Of course, the national holiday honoring King sparked more discussion than any other day. "But we're always trying to raise the awareness level of students, staff and the community," explained Sasse, one of 32 recent winners of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council's Rainbow Awards.

Taking the lead in the awareness-building department is the student council, sponsored by Beechview teachers Dave Workman, Janet Payne and Mark Spritzer. The council spearheaded the various bulletin boards, all with the random acts of kindness theme.

"Our belief is, we've studied Dr. King in the past and they have quite a grasp on the things he did and stood for," said Workman, a fifth-grade teacher. "We tried to get the kids to brainstorm, what can we do to make these things work instead of just talking about it."

Workman also said he couldn't fathom a better way to honor King than by schools teaching children about King's principles.

"Honoring him here at school offers a great opportunity for kids to actively celebrate Dr. King," he said. "We're here, we're doing these things and causing awareness that way. By being in school."



Kindness leaders: Beechview Elementary School officers are fifth-graders Kristen Glynn (left to right) Mikey Stack, Chris Britten and Ashley Nelson.

Student views

Beechview student council officers, all fifth-graders, discussed the importance of having the bulletin boards.

"It's like a way to show we believe in what he said," said President Chris Britten, 10. "When he died (in 1968) he wasn't there when it changed. And so now we're helping it change even more, and make it a better world."

Vice President Ashley Nelson, 10, said the bulletin board entries, be they on the helping hands or feet, provide evidence that people can do nice things for others — and be recognized for them.

The idea is the perfect way to honor King, said 10-year-old Mikey Stack, council treasurer.

"Since we're doing this in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, we should be doing this," Mikey said. "Everybody who starts doing better things in the world should be recognized for it."

The council's secretary, Kristen Glynn, 10, noted that the bulletin boards make a statement that would make King proud.

"It's important to have the bulletin boards," she said. "You want to do kind acts for people like Martin Luther King did. The hands are for helping people out and the feet are for following in Dr. King's footsteps."

At William Grace, principal Katy Hill said the "I Have a Dream" speech boomed over the PA system Monday morning. A bulletin board graces the first-grade wing. But all students at the school are actively learning about a King philosophical staple — respecting others.

"Every student this year is writing a paragraph about what respect means to them," said Hill, noting that all of the entries will be read over the public address system throughout the year.

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