

For Three Years, HEROES ‘Makes A Difference’ at The Western Pennsylvania School For The Deaf

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During the 2007-2008 school year, the character education program “A Study of Heroes” continued throughout the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. The program was originally developed by Rachel Oestreicher Bernheim and Kathleen Morin, who are members of the Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States. Raoul Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat who volunteered to leave the safety of his peaceful homeland in order to save the lives of more than 100,000 Jewish people living in Europe during World War II.

“A Study of Heroes” is a program that is dedicated to teaching about heroes who are willing to stand up for what they believe and are willing to risk their personal safety for their principles. This program was initiated at WPSD in 2005. Each year, a school wide committee chooses new Heroes and Character traits that will be focused on during the school year. These are people with life stories that are positive roles models for the students and as stated in the curriculum “illuminate the admirable and nonviolent character traits desperately needed in the world today.”

The opening kickoff for the school year occurred in September. It was a fantastic event which introduced the two historical figures that would be studied throughout the school year: Abraham Lincoln and Mother Teresa. The two new character traits that were introduced were Respect and Cooperation. Throughout the year, students participated in activities that taught principles of character development and peaceful conflict resolution while integrating many content subjects and areas of study, such as: history, reading, creative writing, mathematics, art, and political/social topics. Staff and students created posters that represented the different character traits and their meanings. These were displayed throughout the school.

The year ended with a school wide activity in the auditorium to celebrate the year. During that time, students were shown a short film that captured the events of the year and also showed students’ own understanding of what a Hero means. An awards ceremony occurred, in which students who were nominated by their teachers, were recognized for their Respectful and/or Cooperative behaviors throughout the year. It was wonderful to see how the proud the students were of themselves when being acknowledged.

We are looking forward to the 2008-2009 school year and the continuation of “A Study of Heroes.”

“Character is doing what’s right when nobody is looking.” J.C. Watts

