

'Champions for Change' Program Celebrates, Embraces Diversity in Schools & Community

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Each one of our students at Lakota Local Schools is unique with regards to the way they learn, their interests and their backgrounds. We celebrate their individuality on a regular basis and embrace the diversity in our schools and our community.

One of the ways we embrace diversity at Lakota, and promote inclusion in and out of the classroom, is through Champions for Change. This program began during the last school year and continues to grow and have a positive impact on our kids this year. Each of our schools has a Champion, a teacher who has volunteered for the position, including our Career Readiness Academy and two representatives from each high school. The role of this group of advocates is to be a resource for their building staff members - someone to bounce ideas off of, ask questions and learn from when it comes to diversity in the classroom.

During its inaugural year, the Champions spent time learning about different cultures and how different organizations and companies embrace diversity. They visited the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati, located in West Chester Township. There, they were able to tour the school and the mosque to learn more about Islam and the Muslim culture. Panel discussions about diversity and inclusion were also held for the Champions and included representatives from Procter & Gamble and Miami University, along with other businesses and community organizations.

Aisha Moore is the program's facilitator. The group discusses questions that have been raised by staff and learns about the professional development lessons they will lead at their individual buildings. In addition, the Champions are beginning a book study on *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debby Irving.

This year, the Champions have four topics they are using during professional development sessions with their building staff: Diversity and Cultural Awareness, Student Achievement, Community Outreach and Retention, and Professional Development. During the diversity and cultural awareness lesson, staff members watched a commercial depicting a child being bullied. Afterwards, a discussion ensued about how to handle a similar situation in their classroom, providing an opportunity to share ideas with one another.

The student achievement lesson will focus on ensuring that all students have the same opportunities in the classroom. For example, how does a teacher make sure that a student whose primary language is not English receives the same education as an English speaking student? In addition, the Champions for Change program is teaming up with our Parent Engagement efforts for one of the lessons later this year.

While the Champions work with staff members, the lessons learned spread to the students. Last year, graduating seniors signed up to participate in the Parade of Champions. Dressed in their caps and gowns, the students traveled to Lakota's elementary schools and carried signs stating their plans for after graduation. The younger students were able to see that older kids, just like them, were planning to attend college, enlist in the military or begin a job.

The demographics in Liberty and West Chester Townships have changed through the years, which also means that our student population is more diverse than ever. The Champions for Change program fosters a culture in our buildings where it is ok to ask questions in order to gain an understanding of one another and appreciate our differences.

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