

This Week at Central Academy

February 11, 2010

From the very first day of school my first year at Central, I have been and continue to be impressed with the diversity in our school. Families from many different backgrounds, cultures, economic situations, and races all believe in our school enough to entrust their children to us daily. Because of this, we (students and adults) are able to grow continuously in our understanding of each other and various perspectives on life. This issue of *This Week at Central* is focused on how we celebrate and embrace diversity at Central.

In January, I had the opportunity to speak to the National Urban Education Conference at Central State University. Six of our middle school students went with me, and helped to share information and answer questions about our school. While each of these students were unique, and come from their own family cultures and experiences, each of them had one thing in common. They each obviously believed in our school, and were able to speak clearly and movingly about it.

The best part of that day for me, however, was when we all adjourned to the student union to talk about our day and what we had learned. That morning, as part of the 650 people gathered in the auditorium, we had the opportunity to listen to several nationally recognized speakers about issues of equity in urban education. I was moved and impressed with the depth of understanding each of the students expressed. Once again, as in other times in the past, our students were the only students of their age (or anywhere near it) at the conference. Once again, the topics discussed were presented for adults around global and national issues. And once again, our students comprehended, internalized, and thoughtfully responded to the conversations of the day.

On the door to my office is a sign that reads, "I am blessed." I put it up a couple of years ago after a staff retreat, when I had realized the degree to which we as a school are blessed with the incredible professionals who daily work far beyond what is asked in order to do whatever is needed for our students. On that day in January at Central State, I also realized once again how blessed we are with the students who choose to come to our school. This amazing and diverse group of young people truly adds to our blessings on a daily basis.

I hope you take a minute to read through the articles in this edition. You can find me "counting my blessings!"

Dianne

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (**You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!**)

www.middletowncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

IMPORTANT DATES

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| Feb. 15 | NO SCHOOL |
| Feb. 16 | Middle School Conference Week
(Wed. late night conference w/teachers until 8) |
| Feb. 17 | Meeting w/Marcia Andrew (Bd. Member)-6:30 in the library |
| Feb. 18 | Skating Party – 6:30-8:30 |
| Feb. 22 | Conference Week (K-5) & Book Fair |

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In Mrs. Brooks' Early Primary Class, we have been learning how to embrace differences among each other. One way we have done this is by learning the different things that each of us like to do with our friends. Our class has been working on a class book that will soon be published called, *Friends are Great!* The students chose the topic of friends because they were interested to see what their classmates like to do and play when they are together with their friends. We learned that some students like to do the same things with their friends as they do with their classmates, and some students enjoy doing different things with their friends.

For example, *Gavin* and *Serina* noticed that they like to do different things with their friends. *Gavin* said, "Friends like to swim together," while *Serina* said, "I like to eat chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream with my friends." Other students discovered that they like to do the same activities with their friends when they are at home. For example, *Hailey* and *Alex* both like to ride bikes with their friends. *LaNiya* and *Lorenai* both like to play dress-up with their friends. Mrs. Brooks' students may all have different things they like to do with their friends, but we have realized that no matter our differences we all still have one thing in common: we are all friends!

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Everyone is different. Here in Mrs. Jantusch's Early Primary class those differences are important and valued. Each student brings unique talents to the classroom each day. These talents and interests provide many "experts" within our room.

At the beginning of the year, we brainstormed a list of things we are experts in. Some of us enjoy sports or being outdoors. *Ashlynn*, *Haley*, and *Camille* are swimming experts. *Sarah* climbs things well. *Ethan* excels at basketball. *Elijah* and *Johrdon* are runners, while *Michael* and *Jayden* adore football. *Trevor* knows a lot about hunting. *Khalil* likes to play soccer. *Tyanna* enjoys sledding. *Taylor* is skilled at riding bikes, and *Corinne* and *Liv* are our authorities on dancing. Some of us are good at helping others. *Nicholas* is an expert at cleaning his room and *Keiara* is terrific at sweeping. *Tenee'* is our expert in shoe tying, something that comes in handy in Early Primary - I assure you! *Will* loves to help people and *Brooklynne* is an expert at dishwashing! Others are specialists in artistic areas. *Paige* enjoys pretending, *Justin* loves to build things, *Gage* draws, *Conner* paints, and *Alysha* and *Mrs. Jantusch* both sing!

This wide variety of interests and "experts" makes our class a winning combination! There is always someone to help you, to answer your questions, or to talk with. Without our diverse interests and abilities, we would not be the exciting mix of personalities you see here in room 109! Who wants to be in a class where everyone is the same? Not me!

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Ms. Roe cannot brag enough about the students in her class when it comes to embracing diversity! Beginning the first week of school, we realized that we all come from different backgrounds, we have varied opinions on topics, and we each have unique talents and individual skill levels when it comes to our schoolwork. Our diversity is what makes our Central family so incredibly awesome!

In this issue of TWAC we will highlight some of the unique talents in our class. We learned very early on that *Carter* and *Payton* could give *Ms. Roe* a lesson or two in illustrating! They pay such close attention to the smallest details when drawing. *Rowyn* and *Emma C.* are two classmates that write beautiful stories during our writing time. They absolutely love that part of our day. We have several students who jump at the chance to lend a helping hand in our classroom: *Alayna*, *Shawvontae*, *Dallas*, *Jordan*, *Austin* and

Chloe. If something needs cleaned up or papers handed out they are the students volunteering on a daily basis. *Mark, Bree, Katie* and *Eristan* have the gift of encouragement. They are right there helping their friends out when they are discouraged or upset.

I am amazed by each and every student in our room! I count it a privilege everyday to work in such a diverse school with such wonderful students and families! There is no better place to come each day!

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While the students in our class are often finding what we have in common, we have discovered that through learning more about one another we are also embracing our differences. When we share our different experiences we get a chance to see things from a different perspective. Many times throughout the day, **Mrs. Uhl & Ms. Stillwell's Early Primary Class** embraces diversity.

During our morning meetings, students have shared what they like to do with their family and friends. Recently, in math, the students discussed how we were all Early Primary students, yet we had several different ages of students in our classroom. In reading, the students have discovered that each arrive at school having different prior knowledge about certain topics which helps us connect with stories differently.

More recently, we have been working on publishing our books about our favorite season. We have noticed that we all enjoy different seasons throughout the year for different reasons. *Hanna* loves summer because she likes swimming with her family. *MyOnna* loves fall because she likes throwing leaves with her friends. *Gabe* loves winter best because he likes sled riding. *Josie* loves spring because she likes to plant flowers. *Isaiah* loves fall because he likes jumping into leaf piles with his sister, and *Alex* likes sled riding with his sister in winter. We have learned to have a better understanding of one another in our classroom by allowing each student the opportunity to share their different views and experiences.

LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In **Mrs. Andrade and Miss Zumbahlen's Room**, we find that we are diverse in more ways than one. Finding commonalities is great, but it is the differences that make everything more exciting. Different genders, grades, and ages are only a few of the key ingredients to our salad bowl.

Gender is a characteristic that makes us diverse. There are thirteen girls (Emily, Rowan, Madison, Amalia, Allison, Briella, Jocelyne, Aly P., Anastasia, Savanna, Kya, Chelsea F., and Chelsea S.) and eleven boys in our class (Hayden, Austin, Jake, Daniel, Day'Sean, Gabe H., Donnie, Briley, Chris R., Chris J., and Aaron).

Central's classification system (grade) makes us diverse. There are fourteen youngsters and ten elders in our class. This becomes important when creating productive teams. If it is an older's second year in our room, then they should really know how efficient teams function; therefore, they can guide their group. The second year of spiraling curriculum also gives them the advantage of thinking differently about something they learned last year. It is like adding another layer of rich information.

Age also makes our room diverse. At this point and time (we all know how birthdays happen daily), there are seven 7 year-olds, thirteen 8 year-olds, and four 9 year-olds in our room. This is a nice enough span for children to interact together and contribute their own individual strengths and talents to their friendships.

If you ever wonder why we have such a great time at school, it is because we realize that we are not all exactly the same. Each individual in any one of the categories listed above have a lot to offer one another, their team, and the entire group. Sharing and learning from one another is probably the most valuable piece of our growing here at Central. So if you want to know if we are different, the answer is absolutely-positively! And, we would not have it any other way.

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Embracing diversity, boy is that a mouthful! You're probably wondering how in **VanBurgey's** and **Mrs. Zahora's** room with 47 students we are able to establish a positive community with all of the diversity in our room. One way that we accomplish this is by using a process called Tribes. This is a way to establish a positive culture for learning in our room. When we have a problem in the classroom we get together in large circle to discuss and problem-solve.

For example, last week, students were concerned about the way their friends in our room were being treated in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, some feelings were being hurt, and students were making poor choices. We gathered everyone together for a tribe meeting to discuss ways to solve this issue. After lots of discussion and openness we decided that we all needed to eat together in the room to help us think about how we can treat our friends nicer in the cafeteria.

It was so refreshing, as we were sitting in our tribe meeting, that all students' voices were heard by using a thumbs up or down gesture. Even though not all of the students were involved in the unkind behavior in the cafeteria, by their show of thumbs, they came to a consensus decision, and all could live with eating in the room for one day. *Adreanna* said, "I could live with it because it wouldn't hurt for all of us to think about how we treat others." We ended our tribe meeting with asking students to look around the circle and think about who is a good friend, and always kind to others. Many students shared that *Jaden* was always kind to everyone in the room. We have decided to reserve Wednesdays for a community lunch in the room, if students feel like coming. Until next time, go Central!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

If we were all the same, the world would be a rather dull place. If the students in **Mrs. Larison's Intermediate** class were all the same, our classroom would also be a rather dull place. Luckily, although similarities do exist, the students are each unique in their own way. Embracing and respecting diversity is important, especially in a world where someone who lives on the other side of the world is only a few clicks of the keyboard away.

One way that students learn about each other is when they share about their lives during our daily Circle Time. Students tell about how they spend time with their families and what they enjoy doing for fun and entertainment. Before and after a holiday, students often share their experiences, providing their classmates a glimpse of the other student's culture and cultural expressions. Students' diversity also comes out when exploring students' various strengths. *Kyra* and *Valkyrie* are artistic and draw colorful and realistic pictures. *Alec* and *Kenny* have vivid imaginations and write creative stories. *Austin* has a mathematical mind and is often able to mentally figure out answers. *Theo* is musically inclined and plays the saxophone. *Barbie* rides horses and is always bursting with energy. I could go on and on listing every student's unique contribution to our classroom, but I hope by sharing these examples, you will understand how embracing diversity creates a more interesting and exciting class. No one would ever be able to use the adjective dull to describe our classroom.

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The students in **Muenchenburgey Land** have very likely heard us say, “If you were all alike, our job would be so boring!” Our differences are what make us all unique. If each child was the same, school could be compared to a factory that produces one uniform product. Every child would come to school with the same experiences and background, have the same learning styles, and perform at the same levels. Fortunately for us, we have an amazing group of students with varying backgrounds, experiences, learning styles, personalities, and performance levels, which allow us to constantly share, interact, and learn from one another. We live in such a diverse community; therefore, the students’ interactions now with each other, only help prepare them for their future. It helps them develop an appreciation for each other as a whole person.

We often find that when students are involved in a conflict, it is the result of the students viewing the situation through different perspectives. We had a discussion with the students about this observation and had them reflect on situations they have been involved in when they have come to realize that the conflict stemmed from two opposite understandings of what happened. *Kiki* and *Mary* recently invited *Lily* to join them in a mini-tribe to help resolve an issue with students from another classroom. Through their discussion in the mini-tribe, the girls realized that the whole conflict occurred because two girls perceived the situation as joking around, while the other two took personal offense to it. Once they discovered that it was a misunderstanding, they worked it out and became friends again.

Cameron and *Jack* shared that they often find themselves in disagreements about something; however, they usually each step away from the situation and think about why the other person was upset. This often leads to one or the other going back and apologizing and explaining why he was wrong because he took the time to consider the other one’s perspective.

Aengys shared that he and *Brennan* have not always gotten along very well; however, they have recently taken the time to get to know each other more. With this better understanding, they have developed a much more positive relationship.

Learning to appreciate other people’s perspectives and differences is a skill that many adults still work towards acquiring. It is not always easy to get past our own feelings and beliefs to consider how others may feel; however, the students in **Muenchenburgey Land** are learning this life skill now. We are so proud of their maturity and thoughtfulness towards each other.

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Diversity is very valued in **Ms. Thinnies’ Intermediate Class**. A few students participated in the Martin Luther King Celebration Assembly. *Karah* and *Noasia* read parts of the Martin Luther King book, entitled *Big Words*. They read their parts with other students from different age groups to celebrate the peaceful movement for equal rights for everyone. Students also sang “Lift Every Voice” and “We Shall Overcome.” So, students are given the opportunities to promote and embrace diversity in exciting ways.

Students in **Ms. Thinnies’ Intermediate Class** also presented at the Celebration of Learning the next day about the crisis in Haiti. The students, along with the middle school, organized a collection of donations to be sent to assist the families of Haiti who have been effected by the earthquakes. The students were going to collect blankets and clothes, but the Red Cross would rather accept monetary donations. *Amirah*, *Amia*, *Paris*, and *Karah* were the presenters. Also, the students are working collaboratively with the Middle School students to collect pop cans that can be recycled for money. The donations of money will help those who are less fortunate and the diverse population of Haiti. So, in **Ms. Thinnies’ Intermediate Classroom** students are embracing diversity while helping people around the world who really need the assistance.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Our society is very diverse. Just look around and you will see it. Diversity enriches our lives. Just as if the biological diversity of an ecosystem intensifies productivity, cultural diversity brings together the resources and talents of many people for the shared benefit of all. At Central, our diversity brings us together and we do share the benefit.

In Middle School, students teach each other how to respect others and not to pre-judge them. *Mikala* and *Aleah* were concerned about the workload of trying to pull everything together for their Humanities contract portfolios, in **Mrs. Hodson's class**. They felt that the amount of time it took to complete their word work took away from the time they should be spending on their contracts. They felt that they could openly talk about their concerns with teachers. In the end, we all reached a compromise.

As a community, we can help each other learn from people who are different from ourselves, including those who do not live near us or who lived long ago. We can teach students to behave respectfully toward other people and make it clear that it is wrong to tease or reject a person because of his or her appearance or heritage. However, we as adults also need to constantly examine how we react to differences, making certain that we model the behaviors we teach.

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Celebrating diversity is at the very heart of the philosophy of Central Academy. Recently **Kristi Joseph** had the privilege of attending the 2010 National Urban Education Conference at Central State University with **Dr. Suiter**, **Miss Fink**, and a group of middle school students. During the morning session, Dr. Na'im Akbar, Susan L. Taylor and Dr. Bobby Jones, all nationally renowned speakers, addressed diversity and equity issues and their impact in the classroom. In the afternoon, Dr. Suiter was a scheduled speaker with the topic of "Reconceptualizing Education to Better Meet the Needs of Today's Urban Students." Also speaking at the conference with Dr. Suiter were our middle school students, *MiKayla*, *Jacob H.*, *Hannah*, *Ayreonna*, *Luke*, and *Stevie*. These middle school students did a phenomenal job of speaking to a standing-room-only crowd. Afterwards, **Dr. Suiter**, **Kristi**, **Miss Fink**, and the middle school students had a powerful discussion on diversity and equity before returning to Central Academy.

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Diversity is essential to any group if the members are to function with fairness and equity. In **Mrs. Smith's Math and Science classes** equity is part of our every day existence. We have a rotating basis for leadership in each of the classes. *Bailey*, *Izzi*, *Tyler*, *Ali*, *Jacob H.* and *Ayreonna* have taken turns as leaders in their independent math groups. *Charles* has stepped on several occasions to help the youngers in our classroom. *Ashley* has given her services as peer tutor for students during class and lunchtime.

Science can be a difficult subject for some students. We label "resident experts" during class who are available to help other students. On several occasions, *Regan* has been "resident expert" in Algebra. I am really proud of all my students in the fairness that they express toward each other on a daily basis. I expect great things from the groups that I have. Success is inevitable when the focus is on the fellow classmates' progress. Support and encouragement of all students, no matter their ability levels, age, gender, or race, are the bylines in our room.

Other Places and Voices Around Central

Diversity is an amazing thing. It's all those things that make us different from one another. Whether it is culture, color, or beliefs, they are all things to celebrate. In the art room we are beginning a self-portrait after doing an illustration unit for the students book that are being published. With this self-portrait it is going to be very important that the students include what makes them unique. You might think that it is easy to answer questions about your self; you would think that you know all the answers, but you would be surprised. With this project I am hoping that all students will embrace what makes them different and unique and learn more about themselves by connecting to their artwork. Knowing and accepting yourself is the first step to accepting others, and if we can do that we can all move mountains together. *"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."* Jimmy Carter

Mr. Perdue took a group of students to Miami to hear a speaker talk about the Holocaust. The students were very attentive to what the gentlemen had to say about the holocaust since he was a German, Jewish survivor. The students were very engaged and several of them asked very engaging questions. *Lillie, Stevie* and *DeAnna* listened intently to what he said and asked him questions such as if he was scared and how did he handle particular situations. He talked about many common sayings that are put-downs and hurtful to others. He talked about how all of these things are considered racist. The student's discussions following the presentation reflected his message about how they use the put-downs towards each other in everyday life and how they could change.

Over the holidays **Mrs. Carroll** worked with a group of intermediate students. The girls organized our annual food drive with several of their friends. A great deal of food was collected and our school was able to help many families in need over the holidays. Two of the girls, *Noasia* and *Alexis* elected to go further and research poverty in Middletown. They are learning about the diversity in Middletown and that poverty happens every day and every month not just the holidays. They are also learning that people get paid differently and depend on multiple resources for their income such as jobs, social security, retirement and welfare. Both girls are interested in making this a school wide effort to help hunger in their community.