



NJDOE News

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Three Schools Honored for Equity and Diversity Efforts

Three New Jersey schools have been honored by the state Department of Education for their staff and students' efforts to systemically incorporate tolerance and respect for diversity and equity into the culture of everyday life in their educational communities.

The schools were recognized last month at DOE's annual *One Step Beyond* conference, which celebrates educators who go "one step beyond" to promote equity and values diversity, change perceptions and create opportunities for young people. It commemorates the work of the late Dr. Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe, a distinguished educator and advocate who served on the New Jersey State Boards of Education and Higher Education.

The three schools and the programs for which they were honored are:

- Northern Highlands Regional High School (Allendale, Bergen County) for the *Student Ambassador Program*.
- Soehl Middle School (Linden, Union County) for *Friends Beyond Borders*.
- Robert Lazar Middle School (Montville, Morris County) for *Character Education From the Inside Out*.

"Awareness and understanding of cultural diversity will be very important for New Jersey students as they enter the 21st century global workforce," said Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy. "We commend these three schools for the development of these exciting and innovative programs, which can serve as an example for schools across the state."

At Northern Highlands Regional, the ninth graders are divided into small groups to participate in a series of eight thematically constructed orientation meetings known as "outreaches" led by trained 11th and 12th grade student ambassadors. The outreaches provide an opportunity for the freshmen to discuss relevant issues in their home and school lives and to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the diversity among their groups while seeing threads of commonality among their varied experiences.

The program at Soehl Middle School is designed to move students beyond the "heroes and holidays" approach to cultural diversity and provide them with a deeper, more meaningful global understanding of critical issues. Teachers incorporate the study of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, form partnerships with the Peace Corps and related international non-governmental organizations, bring in guest speakers and use teleconference so students can critical issues with their peers around the world.

Several of the Soehl teachers also participated in a global education seminar, spending a week in refugee camps and rural schools in the Haitian border area of the Dominican Republic. The teachers shared this experience with the students through blogs and presentations, and developed new lessons and classrooms activities for use during the school year.

The nationally recognized program at Lazar Middle School includes weekly school-wide advisory meetings where students and staff focus on topics that include respect, responsibility, trust, kindness, compassion, teamwork, tolerance, service learning, and a true understanding of how individuals participate in the global community.

These discussions foster a school culture and climate in which students, parents and teachers consistently demonstrate their commitment to a safe, caring environment and become the springboard for school- and community-based activities that make a difference in the lives of others.

The winning programs were selected by an independent review panel which based its decisions on a demonstration of high achievement or growth in the school's effort to promote equity and diversity in secondary grades.

For more information about the Northern Highlands Regional High School program, please contact

Superintendent Dr. Robert McGuire at 201-327-8700 or Assistant Principal Joseph J. Occhino at 201-327-8700, ext. 201.

For more information about the Soehl Middle School program, please contact Superintendent Dr. Rocco G. Tomazic at 908-486-2800 or Principal Diana Braisted at 908-486-0550.

For more information about the Lazar Middle School program, please contact Superintendent Dr. Gary Bowan at 973-331-7100 or Assistant Principal Sharon Carr at 973-331-7140.