

Charlestown Middle School students to accept “Rachel’s Challenge”

Written by Janna Ross

Wednesday, 10 October 2012 09:35 -

Next Wednesday will not be a typical day at Charlestown Middle School. Yes, there will be students learning new skills and yes, there will be students helping other students and yes there will be lessons that will last a lifetime, but this day, students will be accepting a challenge.

Charlestown Middle School Principal Karen Wesely will introduce her students to a new program, “Rachel’s Challenge.”

The kick-off for the program will be held Wednesday, October 17. The program will begin with a one hour assembly for seventh and eighth grade students and a separate one hour assembly for sixth grade students.

“The assemblies are age appropriate and are meant to tug on your heart strings. The event gives you the emotional buy in. I can’t do what they can do. I can give a lecture, but I can’t get the emotional buy in that they can,” Wesely stated.

After the morning assemblies, the students will receive more information about the Rachel’s Challenge project in the afternoon.

According to Wesely, a hour and a half will be spent in the afternoon, with a group of students going through more in depth and hands on training concentrating on the five goals of the program. The five challenges of the program include: Dream Big and Believe in Yourself; Be Kind to Others; Practice Positive Gossip; Show Appreciation and Be the Answer.

“There will be 80 to 100 kids drawn at random to go through the training. I haven’t seen it first hand but I believe they will be put in very hard and realistic situations. They will be taught how to handle those situations,” Wesely explained.

Rachel’s Challenge is a nationwide initiative developed to honor Rachel Joy Scott, the first victim of the Columbine school shooting tragedy.

According to the Rachel’s Challenge website (www.rachelschallenge.org), “Each day 160,000 students do not go to school because they are bullied, teased or harassed. By turning the story of a tragic death at Columbine High School into a mission for change, Rachel’s Challenge, is helping create safer learning environments and making a world-wide impact.”

The Rachel’s Challenge Mission states, “We exist to inspire, equip and empower every person to create a permanent positive culture change in their school, business and community by starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion.”

The website explains the program as, “Rachel’s Challenge is a series of student empowering programs and strategies that equip students and adults to combat bullying and ally feelings of isolation and despair by creating a culture of kindness and compassion. The programs are based on the writings and life of 17-year-old Rachel Scott who was the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999. Rachel left a legacy of reaching out to those who were different, who were picked on by others or who were new at her school. Shortly before her death she wrote, ‘I have this theory that is one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go’,”.

Rachel’s Challenge was started by Rachel’s father and step-mother, Darrell and Sandy Scott. After reading the journals Rachel had been keeping, the couple realized the impact Rachel left on her friends and classmates, but they also realized the impact of her writings and drawings on students around the world.

The students at Charlestown Middle will soon be impacted by Rachel’s message as they learn from the program and accept the challenge. The sixth graders will learn the program through

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“Rachel’s Story.” The program introduces the students to Rachel Scott and her challenge to deliberately reach out to others with kindness. Rachel’s story is told through the eyes of her family including Noah, her nephew, Mike, her brother and her sister, Bethanee. The program teaches the students about the Columbine shooting at a level appropriate to their age and maturity level. The program encourages students to consider their own behavior concerning the five challenges of Rachel’s Challenge. The program outcome, according to the website is “students have a renewed hope that their life matters and they have a purpose. They appreciate the importance of being kind to others for the positive impact it has on both the recipient and on themselves. Participants understand that words have the power to hurt and the power to heal and are inspired to use their words in a positive way. Participants learn the importance of appreciating the ones they love while they can still show that appreciation. Finally, students are empowered with the knowledge that they can and do make a difference, that they can be the answer.”

During the kick-off of Rachel’s Challenge, the seventh and eighth grade students will be introduced to the program appropriate to them, “Rachel’s Impact.”

The Rachel’s Impact assembly is the middle school version of Rachel Scott’s story. The website describes Rachel’s Impact, “Conveyed through stories from Rachel’s life and writings, Rachel’s Impact shows the profound positive impact we have on those around us. Rachel’s Impact demonstrates to the listener the power of deliberately reaching out in word and action to others to start what Rachel called a ‘chain reaction of kindness and compassion’. It encourages participants to examine their own lives in the light of the five challenges.”

After learning the Rachel’s Impact program, students will be motivated to consider where they are in relation to the five challenges presented to them. The lesson will also have students reflect on their relationship with and impact on people around them.

The website states about the outcome of the program, “The program renews the participants hope that their life has purpose through service to others. Rachel’s Impact gives participants permission to forgive themselves and others, and encourages them to start their own chain reaction of kindness and compassion which positively affects school climate.”

Wesely is excited about the program kick-off and the community event following the school kick-off.

The community event for Rachel’s Challenge will be held at Charlestown High School on Wednesday, October 17 from 7 to 8 p.m. The community will be able to see what the project is about, what it stands for and learn more about what the students learned earlier in the school day. The Charlestown Middle School PTO will also host a chili supper fundraiser from 5 to 6:45 p.m. in the Charlestown High School cafeteria prior to the community event.

“This is an important community event. I want the people in Charlestown to be able to say that is not the way we treat people here. This is a community event, everyone in the community is welcome to attend,” Wesely added.

The Rachel’s Challenge project will go beyond the day event at the school. The curriculum has been purchased to provide guidance for the challenge.

“We will have the curriculum for school groups like National Junior Honor Society, Pirate Pride Club and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We also will have counselors to take the curriculum and do classes with all students,” Wesely answered about how the project will be implemented after the initial kick off. “We will be able to use the vocabulary and language Rachel’s Challenge teaches in daily speech. If we are counseling a student, it could be because they are depressed or a behavior message, we will be able to go back to the positive message

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and we can use it with the confident kids that have a lot of social power."

Wesely continued, "On a grander scale, we all will get along and leaders will lead in the positive."

Wesely's goal is to bring the full day experience of Rachel's Challenge to the school every four years.

"Our goal is to bring the full day experience to the students every four years. That way I know every student that comes through Charlestown Middle School will have the experience," Wesely added.

Wesely concluded, "I am hopeful this plants the seeds of compassion, empathy and sympathy. I hope that creates a change in the way we treat each other. We forget as adults how important small social moments are to teens and pre-teens. One small incident can affect them for years. Through tragedy comes that perspective of compassion, empathy and sympathy. I am hopeful we can do this without any tragedy. Hopefully, this will prevent any tragedy."

The Rachel's Challenge project at Charlestown Middle School is sponsored by The New Washington State Bank, Charlestown Parks & Recreation, Jeffersonville Fraternal Order of Police, McDonald's, River Crossing, Dr. Voskuhl and Saint Catherine Regional Hospital.

If you would like more information about Rachel's Challenge at Charlestown Middle School or the Community Event at Charlestown High School on Wednesday, October 17, please call Karen Wesely at 812-256-6363 or e-mail her at kwesely@gcs.k12.in.us.