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## A Symbol of Peace

PeaceBuilders program praises Charlton Street School

by SHAUN MORIARTY

NEWS STAFF WRITER

SOUTHBRIDGE — Dozens of education, town and state officials joined teachers, pupils, parents and other community members to celebrate one local elementary school's achievements in the PeaceBuilders program.

Earlier this year it was announced that Charlton Street School would receive the PeaceBuilders platinum award and be designated as a "Showcase School." The elementary school, which educates grade two and three pupils, was the first in the northeast to take part in the PeaceBuilders program and has faithfully subscribed to the pledges of praise, giving up put-downs and right wrongs since the summer of 1999.

"I'm really proud of this program," Charlton Street School Principal Bryant Montigny told guests Friday morning during a See it, Feel it, Live it," tour of the school campus. "You can walk through the school and leave saying, 'Gee, there's something different about this school.'"

Superintendent Dr. Dale M. Hanley said the warmth and happiness from the building radiates to anyone who enters.

"It just emanates from everywhere in the school," Hanley noted.

Officials said the good vibrations are felt because of the strong commitment of the school's faculty to providing a safe, productive and happy learning environment.

"It is a culture that has been built here," said Charles Gandara of PeacePartners, Inc., the Long Beach, Calif. company behind PeaceBuilders.

Hanley said it's nice to be able to give a pat on the back for a school community that is doing so well.

"We don't always stop to recognize the things that are happening," she admitted.

The natural human tendency to sometimes overlook things, even the positive items, is one principle PeaceBuilders work to improve.

Children receive "Praise Notes" for a variety of actions, including sharing, showing respect and seeking wise people. Teachers keep an eye out for these actions, refusing to overlook the good things that happen.

As a result of the positive environment, proponents claim, children are more interested in getting to school regularly and act as good pupils.

"We find that at PeaceBuilder schools kids want to come to school everyday," Gandara said.

The results: increased attendance, decreased disciplinary actions and, as elementary teacher Jane Beaudreau added, "We are a no bully zone."

During a tour of the building, in which guests visited with faculty and pupils in their vibrantly decorated classrooms, adorned with signs and notes of positive reinforcement, the PeaceBuilders program was evident throughout.

Children performed skits, songs and dance along the tour and even greeted guests at the front door, escorting them to the auditorium. The program was kicked off when seven students led the group in a reading of the PeaceBuilders pledge: "I am a PeaceBuilder, I pledge to praise people, to give up put downs, to seek wise people, to notice and speak up about hurts I have cause, to right wrongs. I will build peace at home, at school and in my community each day."

News Staff Writer Shaun Moriarty can be reached at (508) 909-4142, or by e-mail at [smoriarty@stonebridgepress.com](mailto:smoriarty@stonebridgepress.com).

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