

MAKING WAVES AT DCS



All Are Welcome at Anchor Elementary

November, 2021. At a recent assembly at Anchor Elementary, Young 5 through 2nd grade students were asked to use their eyes and ears to form observations as Principal Craig McCalla read aloud two books celebrating inclusiveness in honor of Native American Heritage Month.

The first story, “All Are Welcome” by Alexandra Penfold, follows a group of children through the school day as they celebrate their different backgrounds and traditions. After reading, Mr. McCalla asked students what they noticed about the story. One student observed, “everyone is different” in the story, while another added, “if everyone liked the same things, it would be boring.” Other students noticed the different country flags in the book’s classroom illustrations, as well as different skin colors and clothing.

Mr. McCalla connected the story’s message with Anchor’s mission to ensure everyone feels welcome in the school. He showed students a new sign recently posted around the building, which states, “Our School Welcomes All Cultures, All Religions, All Genders, All LGBT, All Colors, All Families, All People.” When asked their feelings about the signage, students emphatically agreed that all people are different and all are welcome.

Anchor Elementary has long displayed a rotating “Hall of Heroes” on the wall across from the gym. Earlier this year, the wall consisted of framed mirrors for students to celebrate “you” as a hero. For Native American Heritage Month, Mr. McCalla shared that Anchor is honoring indigenous and First Nation heroes such as Olympic athlete Jim Thorpe, World War II Native American Code Talkers, climate advocate Tokata Iron Eyes, and astronaut John Herrington. Students also learned that the land Dexter Schools occupies are ancestral, traditional and contemporary lands of the Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwe (Chippewa), Potawatomi and Wyandot (Huron) tribes.

Prefacing the second book, entitled, “The First Blade of Sweetgrass,” by Suzanne Greenlaw and Gabriel Frey, students discussed the concept of “traditions” and the traditions practiced in their families. Initially offering up holidays such as Christmas, Hannukah and Halloween, students were asked to think beyond holidays to other meaningful traditions, such as the passing down of favorite family recipes. Greenlaw’s and Frey’s story details a Native American grandmother passing down to her granddaughter the tradition of not picking the first or last blade of sweetgrass seen during harvest. This practice, which has been handed down for generations, is vital to protect and regenerate the land. Students made the connection between their family traditions and the tradition described in the story.

Thanking students for their attention, listening skills and respectful discussion, Mr. McCalla ended the assembly asking students, “*who is welcome in our school?*”

The answer? A resounding, “*Everyone!*”