

# MAKING WAVES AT DCS



## Friendship is a SNAP!

At the DCS Homecoming Parade in September, you may have noticed a school bus filled with happily waving students and staff and the word “SNAP” displayed in large letters. SNAP stands for Students Need Accepting Peers, and it is a Dexter High School club designed to foster friendships and inclusion for Dexter’s special education students. All DHS students are welcome to join SNAP (they currently have about 35 members), but it is also aligned with the Peer to Peer elective taught by Special Education teachers Kallie Nowitzke and Kellison Kohler.

Peer to Peer is a one-semester peer-support class open to grades 9-12 where students act as mentors to students with disabilities and specific learning needs. A student enrolled in Peer to Peer (the “Link”) is a mentor, role model, and friend to a student with specific learning needs. Link students learn to relate to individuals with different needs, develop an increased understanding of individual differences, and become leaders in compassion and tolerance in their school community.

The friendships built through SNAP and the Peer to Peer class accomplish much toward creating a culture of acceptance and inclusion among DHS students. One favorite activity is a simple one, but very impactful: eating lunch together. SNAP meetings are held every Friday at lunchtime, and SNAP leaders and peers rotate sitting with friends throughout the rest of the week to socialize and play games while eating. This small act of kindness goes a long way in teaching peers about empathy and inclusivity, while creating a sense of belonging for our special education students.

In addition to lunchtime fun, SNAP students and peers venture outside of DHS for various field trips and extracurricular activities. Heading out into the community with friends helps students build awareness as well as their social skills. Following their participation in the Homecoming parade, students dressed up for dinner at Aubree’s and pictures along the B2B trail before heading to the Homecoming dance. Small groups also visit local businesses like The Dollar Store and Busch’s to practice shopping and the Dexter District Library to learn about their services. Other fun activities include trick-or-treating downtown, attending football games, and field trips to the Potter Park Zoo and the Creature Conservancy in Ann Arbor.

Earlier this fall, Peer to Peer students took a field trip to Lansing to visit the State Capitol building and the Michigan Supreme Court. Students took a tour of each building, participated in courthouse simulations, and learned about their rights, which aligned with a unit on self-advocacy.

SNAP advisors Nowitzke and Kohler are very encouraged by the student response this year, but are also looking to expand the program. They hope to create additional programming and opportunities to allow more students to participate and guide students to take on more of a leadership role. As the final line of the Peer to Peer course description states, “Link students are truly that: a link that connects a student with specific learning needs to a world of opportunity.” Our community is strongest when everyone is included and feels valued.

*Making Waves – Friendship is a SNAP!*

