

Bethlehem & Woodbury Region 14 Schools

“Joy In January” Challenge Aims to Bring Change to Student Connections at Woodbury Middle School

Positive words. Listening. Being helpful. A card to show appreciation. These small acts are just some of the ideas offered to the Woodbury Middle School community by members of the WMS Alliance group during the kickoff to the “Joy in January” Challenge.

The “Joy in January” Challenge is a month-long school-wide kindness initiative brought forth by eighth grade Alliance member Ava Hirleman who wanted to start the new year off with a boost of kindness.



“We had a mindset challenge in December in Alliance, and it went so well that I thought we should do something for the whole school,” Hirleman said. “It seemed like a good way to start the new year off by being kind and offering words of encouragement to each other.” Hirleman said she hopes this challenge will foster a more connected and inclusive middle school community.

Alliance leaders introduced the challenge to students and teachers during the Friday morning WMS Family and will check in with them every week to see how the challenge is progressing. “The idea was to bring this to WMS Family because all the grades are mixed together and it’s a time that students in different grades can make some connections,” Hirleman said.

Alliance member Julia Gwiazdoski, who is in eighth grade, said she feels the WMS Family groups are the perfect place to start this joy challenge. "Sometimes we as eighth graders don't remember what it was like as a sixth grader," Gwiazdoski said. "In WMS Family we are building relationships with each other and it's a great place to start these kindness connections."

Some of the ideas presented in the "Joy in January" challenge include asking questions and listening to answers, saying hello in the halls, using positive words to build up confidence for a peer, cleaning up your space or lunch table, showing kindness with a card, a song, opening a door, or even helping a fellow student carry supplies. "Just step up and do little extra to bring joy to someone," Hirleman said.

Students and staff are encouraged to complete as many of the challenges as possible throughout the week - pick and choose from the lists posted in WMS Family and around the school or come up with their own idea for making a positive connection.

Adam Brutting, co-advisor of the WMS Alliance said this challenge is a wonderful way to raise the bar on kindness in school. "The challenge is to create a more positive school culture and to encourage all people in the school to be more mindful about their actions," Brutting said. "By participating, the hope is that individuals feel more positive about themselves, their peers, and the school in general."