

Won't you be our neighbor

- By DAVE LEVESQUE, Laconia School District
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"We want to raise our children so that they can take a sense of pleasure in both their own heritage and the diversity of others."

– Fred Rogers

Each year at Pleasant Street School, we pick a person, a hero, a leader, that we want our students to learn about. This year, we chose Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Our students, staff and family members have joined together in the belief that we all can be positive and supportive neighbors in the city of Laconia.

Laconia is a historical and wonderful city located in the heart of the Lakes Region. For those of you who live here year-round, you know of the many amazing parts of our city. But did you know that our schools are embedding our community into our everyday teaching and learning for our youngest residents?

Under our districtwide strategic plan there is a section called "Community Based Education." The goal of this section is for our schools to "utilize our community as a classroom." Through this initiative, our three elementary schools have embarked on an adventure to get our students better connected to our community.

As much as we would love to see our Laconia High School alumni venture out and find employment in other areas of the world, it gives us a sense of pride when a former student returns to Laconia to begin a career and a family. Alone at Pleasant Street

School, we have close to 20 faculty and staff members who attended LHS. Many of them have children in our schools and have continued to support the “Laconia Way,” and our efforts to teach our students about our community.

“One of the greatest dignities of humankind is that each successive generation is invested in the welfare of each generation.”

– Fred Rogers

At the three elementary schools – Elm Street School, Woodland Heights School and Pleasant Street School – we have taken this initiative to heart. We want our students to love Laconia, to feel safe in Laconia, to give back to the community and embrace its diversity. For our team, this initiative is not simply words on a paper. Rather, it has become a passion and way of connecting our students to our city. Since Sept. 1, the three schools combined have completed 45 community-based activities.

Through the first few months at Elm Street School, the fifth-grade students took on a project-based learning activity called “Cans for a Cause.” Using math strategies and teamwork, the students collected 10,000 cans of food and donated them to St. Vincent DePaul. ESS students have also connected with Pam Clark from the Historical Society to put items into the time capsule, been caroling at the Taylor Homes, visited local municipal businesses and had a community “Write Night.”

Woodland Heights School has been building relationships within our neighborhood as well. The second- and fourth-graders made “Care Bags” for patients at Lakes Region General Hospital who are going through chemotherapy. The school community raised money for the Lakes Region Children’s Auction, hosted a breakfast for local veterans, had a bake sale to support the Humane Society and carved over 300 pumpkins for Pumpkinfest.

At Pleasant Street School, students participated in "The History of Laconia Writing Marathon." Our students visited the Belknap Mill, the former Laconia Car Company, the train station, the Colonial Theatre and many other historical spots to write about these areas. The students have visited local municipalities through walking field trips, raised and donated money to local groups in need, participated in Granite United Way Volunteer Day and written thank-you cards to military personnel overseas.

For our three schools, this is only the tip of the iceberg in our efforts to connect our students with our community. Our teachers are invested in building positive relationships with local business owners, nonprofits and community leaders to bridge the gap. Laconia has so many wonderful things to offer and we want our students to feel welcome and cared for in the city.

"So let's make the most of this beautiful day, since we're together, we might as well say, would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor?"

– Fred Rogers

Dave Levesque is principal at the Pleasant Street School.