

ACES Initiative at Spring Avenue

In the 2016-17 school year, the ACE Initiative was created as an answer to the question, “What do we do to celebrate diversity at Spring Avenue?” The Initiative has since expanded to answer the question, “What do we do to promote understanding, compassion, and service to the community?”

The original program consisted of presentations given by the 6th Grade Leadership Club at selected Morning Kickoffs, approximately one per month. These presentations focused on different cultures around the world by highlighting a different continent every month. They included information about customs and traditions from various cultures, as well as individuals who have made significant contributions to society, such as authors, artists, athletes, and political leaders. The individuals that were highlighted included both people from each of the continents themselves, and Americans who could trace their ancestry to those places.

Quickly, the presentations were expanded to include education regarding special needs. Students have given presentations on Down Syndrome, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy, to name a few. The purpose of all of these presentations was to provide students with an understanding of differences among their schoolmates and people in general, as a critical step in accepting and embracing others for their unique cultures, ethnicities, beliefs, and needs. Hence, the ACE acronym stands for **Accept, Celebrate, and Elevate**.

The following year, we began our Spring Avenue and District 105 elementary community service projects, which included projects for active duty military personnel, the D105 Care Closet, Meals on Wheels, SCARCE (an organization donating school supplies to students in need), Loving Without Limits (an organization supporting families of children with long hospital stays), and others. Since an important element of community service is compassion and empathy for others, it was included under the umbrella of the ACE Initiative, and the service piece was added to make it the **ACES Initiative—Accept, Celebrate, Elevate, and Serve**.

From 2017-2019, we have added several important elements to the ACES Initiative. In 2017-18, we first invited high school students from The Leadershop to perform skits and conduct workshops to reinforce the ideas presented at Morning Kickoffs. These were also connected to our Cultural Arts assemblies. For example, when we had an actor portraying Martin Luther King Jr. as our guest in March of 2019, the teen leaders from The Leadershop created classroom workshop activities that enhanced the students’ understandings of Dr. King’s message. In 2018-19, we started a student club for 4th-6th Graders that took over the responsibilities of the informational presentations at Morning Kickoffs. In this club, students generated ideas for the presentations based on things they had learned in school or seen on the news. In the fall of 2018, we rejuvenated the Peace Pole and planted the Peace Rocks garden that served as a fundraiser for our community service project the previous spring.

Celebrating the Peace Pole at Fall Fest, which coincides with International Peace Day, has now become a tradition which we intend to continue. We have also added a parent steering committee that meets 2-3 times per year to generate ideas for the ACES Initiative.

Throughout all of this, the most gratifying aspect has been the student response and support from parents. Obviously, none of this would have been possible without students embracing the ideas and stepping up to give their time and/or money for the community service projects. Their attitudes and approaches to our guest speakers and teen leaders have been wonderful, and everything they have done in this arena shows that they have kind and generous natures. The goal of the ACES Initiative is to cultivate those kind and generous natures in our students, and provide them opportunities to deepen their understandings of other people, and give something back to the community and the world.

I would like to invite any parent interested in participating in the steering committee to email me at blawson@d105.net. Involvement at any level is appreciated, and ideas from parents are extremely valuable in guiding this work.