Character and Safety go Hand-in-Hand

As you approach the front entrance of Northview High School, it’s hard to miss the banner that reads “Promoting Practices in Character Education 2010 National Award Winner.”

“Character education is the foundation of everything we do here,” said Northview Principal Stephanie Valleroy.

Northview students built upon that foundation last month when they, along with students from neighboring Ackerman School, took an anti-bullying pledge while standing together to form a giant peace symbol on the lawn outside of the two schools.

Since implementing character education, Northview has seen a reduction in school discipline issues — especially with office referrals and suspensions.

“Character education provides multiple opportunities for students to reflect on what is the right choice or action,” Valleroy said. “As a result, students stop and think about how their actions affect others, which results in a safer environment.”

And it is this component of character education that is a natural fit with Safe Schools Week.

Safe Schools Week, which this year is Oct. 17–21, offers schools the opportunity to stress the importance of school safety by highlighting ways to make sure students have the safest environment possible. Each SSD school has an individual safety plan that includes specific procedures regarding visitors, student pick-up, emergency drills and other precautions.

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One of the unique aspects of the Career and Technical Education program at SSD is the ability for students to gain the hands-on experience they need to move toward the career they plan to enter.

With more than 30 programs in a wide range of fields, the Career and Technical Education program offers a variety of options. The program partners with more than 370 employers and schools to help students gain experience and expertise they could not receive elsewhere. And several programs offer dual-enrollment opportunities, where students can work toward professional licenses, apprenticeships, certifications and college degrees while also earning a high school degree.

But collaboration isn’t just with outside partners.

“Our staff really work well together,” Palmer said. “A student may learn one thing in the shop from one instructor, and then the next day they work with a guidance counselor or librarian to practice a mock interview. Everyone has their area of expertise, and the staff works so well to help the students apply things to real-world situations.”

Two 2011 graduates have displayed the skills they learned at South Technical High School and turned them into award-winning creations. Robert Patzius and Brandon Allen both graduated from the welding program at South Tech this spring, and each earned impressive recognition for their works of art.

Patzius earned a bronze medal in the welding sculpture contest at the SkillsUSA National Championships held in Kansas City in June. His “Autumn Inspiration” sculpture had earned a gold medal at the Missouri SkillsUSA competition before being entered into the national contest.

The project, which took six months to complete, was judged on both the sculpture itself as well as the step-by-step process that Patzius presented to the judges to detail how he made his sculpture and what he learned from the experience.

Allen, who placed second in the Missouri SkillsUSA competition, took first place at the Cee Kay Supply welding contest for his St. Louis Cardinals-themed sculpture. “Cardinal Fever” featured a stainless steel replica of baseball’s World Series trophy along with a cardinal perched on top of a bat and ball.

For winning the contest, Brandon received a Miller ArcStation 60SX weld table.

Both were students in Adam Hol’s welding class at South Tech, and both currently are enrolled at Missouri Welding Institute.

“The training that the welding students receive at South Tech simulates hands-on real-world experience just like that of job sites,” Holt said. “Upon graduation, most of our welding students will continue to further their education at either Tulsa Welding School or Missouri Welding Institute to obtain their master pipe welding and fitter degree. Others pursue a career immediately after graduation.”
I am so excited about this opportunity. I'm so proud to represent my students, my colleagues and the district.

That was Vicki Nelson's reaction when she learned the news that she was chosen as one of six finalists for the Missouri Teacher of the Year.

Nelson, a teacher at Litzsinger School, was the 2010 SSD Teacher of the Year. In August, her application was submitted to the Missouri State Teacher of the Year committee. Among the dozens of applications from throughout the state, Nelson's was selected as one of six finalists.

Here is an excerpt from the state application that helped earn Vicki state recognition:

“I can remember three things I wanted to be when I grew up: a ballerina, an archerologist, or a teacher. Being a teacher moved to the top of the list when I saw the movie, “The Miracle Worker.” Most people remember the last scene when Anne Sullivan is pumping water from the well and finger spelling W-A-T-E-R into Helen Keller’s hand. However, the scene that most impacted me was the dinner sequence when Anne Sullivan is pumping water from the well and finger spelling W-A-T-E-R into Helen Keller’s hand. In addition, I was able to refine and share all the literacy and language materials I had created; all of which evolved into the “Litz Read Program.” Currently there are 31 “Litz Read” units uploaded to my district’s server. I continue to add new units every year, and they are available to hundreds of teachers across St. Louis County. The idea of using technology in the classroom was new when I first started teaching. I started with one computer that most of my students could not access. I took trainings and wrote grants to obtain the adaptations needed to make the computer the vital tool that it has become. The computer is their pencil. A classroom of students cannot share one pencil and effectively learn. Currently, every child in my classroom has his or her own computer with adaptations specific to each of his or her access needs. Over the course of my 30 years in education, the technology that my students use continues to change and new technology constantly appears on the market. A few years ago, when my district began exploring the use of iPads, I was asked to develop a use for them in my classroom. I created training videos for each of my student’s communication devices and transferred the videos onto each student’s iPad allowing them and their parents to learn the fundamentals of the device at home. This year, I have been exploring the many uses of the iPad. My students are technology dependent. It is how they are able to demonstrate to the world that they are capable. I continue to be excited and inspired by these new tools.

Recently, I had a meeting with the school psychologist. He had been observing several children in my classroom over the course of the school year. After the latest observation he said to me, “I am always amazed to see the things your students are doing. It would be easy to write them off if I didn’t see them doing their work on their computers.” Giving the students the right tools and support not only allows them to access the curriculum, it also allows people to see and appreciate their true potential. People are able to see that they can learn and that they are capable. This is one of my greatest joys.

I am so thankful that so many years ago I did not see a movie about archeology or dancing because I hate getting dirty, and quite frankly, I would look ridiculous in a tutu. It is fitting that it was “The Miracle Worker” because it set me on the path to education. Teaching is what I was meant to do — it is who I am.”