

A Day of Respect at Stanley Middle School

By Jean Follmer



Educational Theatre Company performs at Stanley Day of Respect assembly

Photo Jean Follmer

Every three years, Stanley Middle School students break from their routine for a Day of Respect, an integral part of the Year of Respect. Stanley has three themes which rotate annually: Responsibility, Integrity and Respect. Stanley students experience each theme at some point during their 6th, 7th and 8th grade years.

The theme of the 2008 Day of Respect was “Everyone Counts and You Can Count on Me”, a reinforcement of the existing Stanley theme. Counselors Sarah Day and Shirley Haberfeld coordinated the event. Teams of five (parent, community representative, high school student, 8th grader and teacher) were trained to handle the activities throughout the day. The day began with an assembly that centered on a skit by The Educational Theatre Company of Los Angeles. The skit was set in a peer mediation meeting after school and reviewed the events that necessitated the meeting. The characters were the mediator, a girl, a boy and a bully. In one scene, the bully shouted gender based insults at the girl. In another, the bully hurled insults at the boy for being a nerd. After much back and forth, the bully explained his behavior by say-

ing, “I never started making fun of other people until people started making fun of me. Then I’d go home and my sister would pick on me too. Then I started hitting people first and teasing people first so I could get the upper hand.”

The mediator, an actor named Gigi, pointed out that the bully’s insults were fueled by prejudices. She explained that prejudices can exist due to sexism, racism or numerous other differences between people. Gigi asked whether or not it would be good if everyone were the same. “What’s wrong with people being different?

We can’t all be the same. If we were, we’d all like the same music and we’d all wear Uggs. Life would be impossible.”

Kids often don’t realize how much they hurt others when they use their words as weapons. When an actor hurled an insult at another, the recipient shouted “Ow!” because the words hurt and “make scars inside”. A student said “This helped us realize that (although) name calling doesn’t always seem bad, it is.” Gigi suggested the students should “Let people know they’re hurting you. It may cause them to do a personal inventory

and think about it the next time.”

People rarely know the reasons for the perceived differences of others. In the case of the boy in the skit, he said he was always smart and started getting teased for getting straight A’s. He said “Nobody wanted to be my friend, so the lonelier I got, the more I turned to books.

The more I got teased, the more I turned to books and the more I turned to books the more I got teased.” An observer pointed out that being teased for grades, both good and bad is not uncommon in this community of overachievers. Some kids find themselves stuck in an endless cycle, and events like the Day of Respect give those kids a better chance because the bullies are being educated about the effects of their behaviors on others.

The importance of respect, tolerance and understanding were emphasized. According to Sarah Day, “The event is representative of the many grass root efforts at Stanley to foster not only quality education, but a school community which reflects and supports respect and dignity for all.”