

PRESS RELEASE



Circle of Friends Project Promotes Understanding and Acceptance of Disabilities

The Circle of Friends project's goal is to bring the understanding and acceptance of disabilities by establishing an environment of inclusion and providing opportunities to improve social skills. This is accomplished by building multiple circles of friendship with non-disabled peers.

Each student with special needs meets with a "circle" of two to three friends from general education once a week on Friday, throughout the school year. The general education students are trained to model and shape appropriate social language skills and behaviors. This program has the dramatic impact of bringing students with disabilities out of isolation and increasing their self-esteem, thus leading them to a more successful and self-sufficient adult life.

Gineta Swanson, Speech Language Pathologist, and Jessica Wyckoff, Special Education Teacher, explained to students in class and morning assembly about the Circle of Friends program. They explained their role, time and location, and that each participant will have to have parent permission. A letter was sent home explaining the program with a permission slip attached.

Circle of Friends began the week after Labor Day. They meet every Friday as a group for a lesson. Two friends from each grade attend weekly. Friends eat lunch together, play at recess, and partner at specials and morning assemblies, etc. As peer friends arrive in morning for assemblies, they go to the target student and take them to sit with their class and friends. Many students have expressed an eagerness to participate and have shown an acceptance of differently abled students.

Pictured: Azlyn Hicks, Rose Johnson with para professional Sarah Hollingsworth.
In the background is paraprofessional Keli Patterson, Savannah Mitchell and Kashlyn Horinek

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November 8, 2017