



# QuEd up for Education

People and programs impacting our QCSD community

## District 4th graders celebrate diversity

*A curriculum developed by the Peace Center taught students tolerance and empathy.*

By Gary Weckselblatt

All fourth graders in the Quakertown Community School District have completed a program designed to develop tolerance and empathy among students while building a more inclusive classroom community.

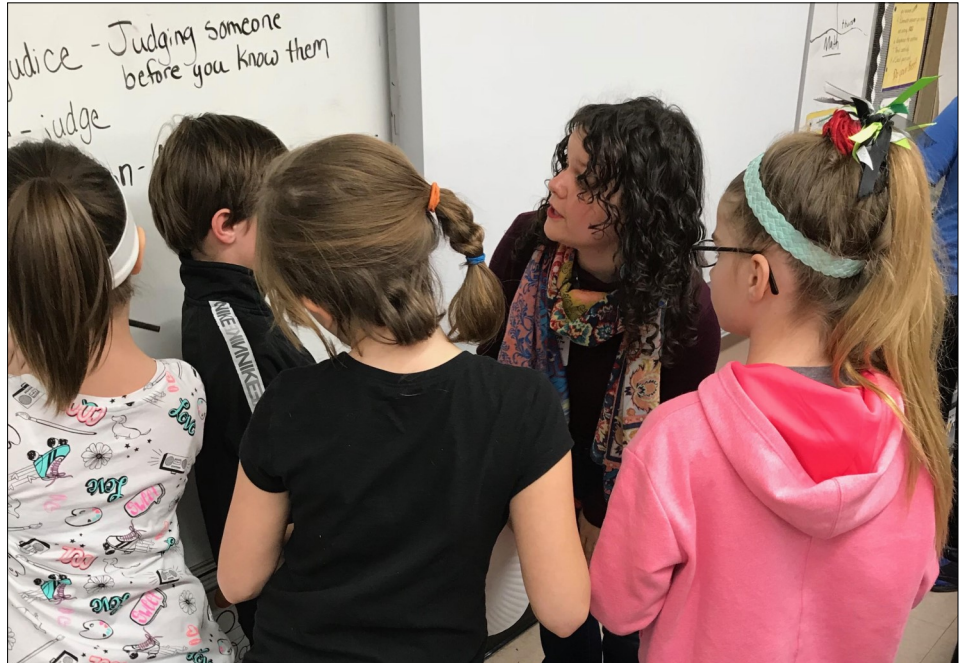
The students took part in five, 45-minute sessions of the program titled "Celebrating Me, Celebrating You." It was developed by the Peace Center, a social justice organization hired by the district's administration and School Board.

The curriculum, which took place during a science/social studies period, was one of several initiatives taken by district officials following the Oct. 6 Cheltenham-Quakertown football game, after Strayer Middle School students shouted racial taunts at Cheltenham's cheerleaders.

In addition, the district signed up for a system-wide diversity and inclusion initiative with the Pearl S. Buck Foundation. The organization will assess 400 employees as part of "The Welcome Workplace" program, in which professional trainers and staff will work with district leadership and stakeholders to build individual and group intercultural competency.

Kate Whitman, the Peace Center's assistant director, said studies show that if children don't learn of tolerance by the fourth grade, "it gets more difficult for them to see prejudice and know what to do" as they get older.

The organization's work in QCSD, she



**Kate Whitman, assistant director for the Peace Center, a social justice organization, worked with Quakertown Community School District fourth graders to help them develop a more inclusive classroom.**

said "was an exceptionally positive experience for us. All of the principals were in the classroom. That's really rare. That sends such a powerful message to the kids.

"When you have such a commitment from leadership, that does filter down and make a difference."

During one period, students were asked about assumptions. On one side of a paper plate, they wrote down things people might say about them. On the other, they jotted down who they really are.

"Some people call me four eyes because I wear glasses, and they think I'm weird," one girl said. "But I'm cute, and I'm wild."

The exercise, facilitated by Whitman, generated student conversation of how

people may assume things about someone strictly from their appearance. And, oftentimes, that assumption can be hurtful and wrong.

Alyson Kriner, a fourth-grade teacher at Richland Elementary School, said the Peace Center classes allowed students to ask questions while they were "in a safe space, and in an age appropriate way."

Whitman said much of the instruction is "to help students see differences as a positive. We want them to feel good about their identity, become interested in the differences of others, and to celebrate those differences."

*Gary Weckselblatt, director of communications, writes about the people and the programs that impact the Quakertown Community School District. He can be reached at 215-529-2028 or [gweckselblatt@qcscd.org](mailto:gweckselblatt@qcscd.org).*