Southern Door High School Students Explore Civility

I had learned about the civility project that would be started at Southern Door High School last fall at our DC Civility Project committee meeting. While I knew that I wanted to share this through the column, I decide to do so at the end of the school year. I recently sat down with Steve Bousley, Principal of Southern Door High School, to discuss the civility project. The Southern Door School System has prescribed to the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports(PBIS) for the elementary and middle school. According to DPI( Department of Public Instruction) this is “a systematic approach to proactive, school-wide behavior based on a Response to Intervention model” which are “programs and strategies for all students to increase academic performance, improve safety, decrease problem behavior and establish a positive school culture”. Common rules are Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe.

Steve told me that they wanted to provide a program to the senior high students that would reinforce these positive behaviors and expand their knowledge and skills that will enable them to meet their next experiences- college, career, community. It was decided that the Door County Project was their best tool. When approached by the district, several members of the steering committee were excited to collaborate.

From the start this was a “work in progress”. During the first year the students, faculty, and high school community would be introduced to the nine tools of civility. One tool a month would be explored during ELT( extending leaning time). Once a month Shirley Senarighi, Diane Slivka, and Gretchen Montee would gather around Shirley’s kitchen table and develop a format of instruction which included discussion/questions, simulation, and What does it sound like, look like, and feel like for a tool. This would be passed to Steve for review and then to the faculty to implement.

Throughout the school year one could see evidence of its beginning. Posters of the tools hanging on the walls are eye catching. When discussions of current events, the 2016 elections, world issues, and other controversial issues were held, now there was yet another angle to input-civility and its tools. Examining a tool is personal, one begins to thing about basic needs- safety, belonging, building relationships.

When the school year begins next fall, this program will continue and expand. Steve expects that these tools will be explored more in depth. While faculty is doing the facilitating at this point, he hopes that eventually it will be the students that will lead the implementation. He expects that it will take several years to see the full effects of this program. Lastly he is in discussion with another school district that is interested in the program.

What a great extension to the DC Civility Project efforts. First it allows the high school students to continue the practices that they have learned previously. We all know that if we do not practice, we can begin to forget. Secondly, as older students, they need further expansion of those tools and then practice. With our ever presence of seeing the world in its many uncivil actions it is so encouraging to know that in one school, students are given alternative. Lastly, civility will be impacted not just on the students, but the entire staff, the student’s families, and our community.

Thank you Southern Door School District and I look forward to hearing about your further progress.

Orlaine I. Gabert

Door County Civility Project