

Red Ribbon Week Community Walk

*John B. Cary Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

The red balloons were awesome, the walk invigorating, the pizza delicious, and the message loud and clear: “I pledge to lead a drug-free life . . .”

The Red Ribbon Week Community Walk at John B. Cary Elementary School brought together students, parents, teachers, area residents, and community leaders on an October afternoon to educate students and their families about the dangers of drug use and to increase community involvement in the anti-drug cause. More than 140 people participated in the walk and consumed every last morsel of pizza at the dinner that followed.

October 2004 marked the first time Cary Elementary participated in National Red Ribbon Week, a drug prevention promotion supported by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). It began in the late 1980s to honor the memory of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena, who was killed by drug traffickers in Mexico in 1985. The week is a time to remember those lost in the fight against drugs, to pledge to live a drug-free life, and to be grateful for the many people who remain drug-free, the DEA says.

Cary Elementary joined the cause as a way to involve the school and the community in preventing drug abuse, based on a concept developed by the school’s parent involvement facilitator and guidance counselor. “We believe in the importance of connecting our school, families, and local community,” said the parent involvement facilitator. “In addition, we are located adjacent to a city park and have a great track for an activity such as this.”

Not only was there widespread involvement in the walk itself, but also in the preparations. School administrators helped with the details, and parents helped promote the event by word of mouth and with fliers, a red ribbon tree outside the main office, and televised morning announcements in school. On the day of the walk, parents and students had a great time inflating the helium balloons.

Each walker received a balloon and many wore red clothes and, of course, red ribbons. The assistant principal arrived dressed as a cheerleader, and led the crowd in the Drug-Free Pledge, getting louder with each recitation. Then, the marchers walked the track around the school grounds. “The visual impact of the red balloons was amazing and could be seen from a distance,” said the parent involvement facilitator.

After the walk, everyone enjoyed pizza in the park and went home with red Twizzlers for dessert and a good feeling.

The walk was the high point of Red Ribbon Week, which Cary also observed with activities such as “Sock It to Drugs,” a crazy sock day, and “Drugs and I Don’t Mix,” a day for wearing mismatched clothes.

The walk won praise from everyone involved. “It was a nice family event,” said one parent. “It is nice to see that the school seems to care so much about the kids and the families,” added a community member. The teachers were pleased at how many parents supported the school and had “fun together as true neighbors.”

Cary Elementary is already planning to participate in Red Ribbon Week next year, and

organizers are hoping that the walk will become a signature event for the school. Next year, they will increase their food order significantly, regardless of registration. “The only challenge we faced was having enough food for everyone,” noted the parent involvement facilitator, making the Red Ribbon Walk a red letter day.

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