

Support Peace: Violence Prevention Week

*Forest Home Avenue Elementary School
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Too many disciplinary referrals and suspensions in school and a general feeling of unrest in the neighborhood prompted Forest Home Avenue Elementary's Action/Learning Team to plan Violence Prevention Week to educate students in nonviolent problem-solving methods. The week incorporated academic and school spirit activities, finishing off with an assembly encouraging students to "Support Peace."

Violence Prevention Week, held in mid-April, furthered the work of the school's Peer Mediation program, a year-round initiative to increase awareness of peaceful ways to solve conflict. Throughout the year, staff, parents, and students were trained as peer mediators and gave presentations to other students.

The weeklong violence prevention event began with presentations and skits in each classroom about the importance of peaceful conflict resolution. The students, working in groups of four, wrote skits about nonviolence. The peer mediators introduced the week's theme days, which included Dress Crazy Day and Wear Pajamas Day. The peer mediators also distributed fliers, pencils, and purple ribbons to the students to promote the week's purpose.

Another activity was the Violence Prevention Read-In. Community members and parents came to read to students and discuss diversity, tolerance, safety, conflict resolution, and the negative impact of bullying. Other activities also kept students thinking about violence prevention. Some classrooms made paper "peace doves," on which students wrote what

peace looks like or means to them. The school also promoted an anti-bullying essay contest to integrate writing into the week.

Violence Prevention Week culminated with the "Support Peace" assembly, organized by the peer mediators and school staff. They invited McGruff the Crime Dog and members of the Milwaukee Police Department to speak about nonviolence and act out situations with students in the audience. Students decorated the gym with their peace doves to demonstrate their "Vision of Peace." Eight students read their anti-bullying essays. Student dancers, working with a choreographer from the community group Danceworks, performed a sparkling finale. The assembly provided an opportunity to thank the peer mediators and advisors for their hard work on Violence Prevention Week.

The week made students more aware of their behavior and taught them more ways to resolve disputes peacefully. Parents and teachers said students have been managing their emotions better since the event.

"Wow, what a wonderful group of students," said one police officer. "If there is any other way that we can be utilized, please do not hesitate to call." Volunteers from the Read-In were equally impressed. "I was able to open some minds, and I love doing that!" said one of them.

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