



A group of eighth graders and two teachers in the Florham Park school district have been honored by the superintendent and the Board of Education as "Pillars of Character" for their efforts at befriending a peer who is suffering from cancer. The group was recognized publicly at the Feb. 22 board meeting. From left are: Teacher, Brian McParland, Anzor Dzhatdoyev, Jemal Mitchell, Edgar Keane, Nicholas Bassolino, Mathew Clark, Emily Bilse, Abby Franco, Amanda Cosentino, Sarah Diamante and Teacher Vincent Putignano.

FLORHAM PARK – The grades K-8 school district has given special recognition to a group of its oldest students for being part of the Ridgedale Middle School's "Pillars of Character" and earning the district's Citizenship Award.

Superintendent Steven Caponegro said the honors were bestowed at the school board's Feb. 22 meeting, and were a part of his monthly Superintendent's Report.

"I personally called the families of these specific students the previous weekend to congratulate them on this honor and for their actions, but I also thought they deserved public recognition at the Board of Education meeting. I invited the students and families to be in attendance at the meeting via zoom, as well as the staff members," Caponegro explained.

With the support of teachers Brian McParland and Vincent Putignano, the eighth grade class created a friendship with a young boy who is currently battling cancer. As part of the district's recently implemented social-emotional learning (SEL) initiative, this class has started writing letters to this young boy, as the class pen-pal. The cards the students have been sending have included words and pictures of encouragement, and both the young boy and his parents could not be more thankful, Caponegro explained.

"These students have used some of the SEL and Boost periods on Mondays and Fridays to voluntarily write these letters. The young boy and his parents have been so appreciative of the thoughtfulness and genuine interest this class has taken in lifting his spirits in his fight against cancer, and the district cannot be more proud of their efforts," the superintendent said.

He said he wants to publicly recognize and celebrate the efforts of the following eighth graders: Nicholas Bassolino, Emily Bilse, Gabriella Brady, Aidan Buneta, Matthew Clark, Amanda Cosentino, Matthew DeFrancesco, Dante DeLuca, Sarah Diamante, Jude Dowden, Anzor Dzhatoev, Abbie Franco, Edgar Keane, Anthony Losacco, Jemal Mitchell, Saige Price, Natalia Rodriguez, Giovanna Scallero, Michael Thomas and Derek Vazquez.

“I also recognize and thanked Mr. Putignano, the staff member that initiated this activity, as well thanked all the students and families that took the time to attend the board meeting,” Caponegro said.

He said the social emotional learning curriculum is in its second year of implementation in the Florham Park Schools.

“These acts of kindness exemplify the importance of social-emotional learning and how we all can positively influence someone’s life,” he said.

“How we choose to act and react is a choice... and what an incredible and impactful choice they have made. I could not be any more proud of these young men and women,” he added.

“A single act of kindness is like a ripple effect, it spreads. That is why it is so important to not only teach students about social emotional learning and acts of kindness, but model this behavior at school, at home and in our communities.”