



NJDOE News

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State Board of Education Recognizes Two Outstanding Collingswood Students

The State Board of Education today recognized two students from Collingswood High School in Collingswood, Camden County, for their work as positive teen role models for younger students. The honored students, Kira Broecker and Stephanie Smith, participate in Project Sharp, a program that combines tutoring and mentoring students from the Sharp Elementary School in Collingswood.

"Kira and Stephanie exemplify the idea that young adults can, through their knowledge and compassion, serve as effective teachers and role models for younger students," said Maud Dahme, president of the State Board of Education. "Programs such as Project Sharp allow young people like Kira and Stephanie to contribute to the strength of their communities."

Project Sharp is now in its fourth year. It was designed to ensure that second grade students at Sharp Elementary School would benefit from weekly interaction with positive teen role models from the high school. The second graders received help with math and writing activities from their "buddies," who also helped them compile a book of collaboratively generated poetry. The teens reported that they benefited by participating in an important community service and gained personal satisfaction by providing their buddies with the essential support and mentoring they needed.

"Our 'at-risk' students who regularly go home to empty houses or to an after-school program developed a sense of comfort and self-worth knowing their buddy had a genuine interest in their well-being," said Collingswood Schools Superintendent James H. Bathurst. "The message to 'do your very best in school' dominated and made this program a success."

"I have formed a special bond with my buddies over the years," said Stephanie Smith. "I enjoy looking at life through the eyes of a second-grader - it gives me a different perspective on things."

Teachers organized and developed the program through extensive planning and decided on the project's objectives. Students in Project Sharp will:

- understand the importance of collaborative working with others in a cooperative environment;
- mentor and learn from each other using their personal skills;
- participate in problem-based math to enhance interest and understanding;
- use oral communications and the sharing of books to compile writing activities for a book of collaboratively generated poetry; and
- use their personal and learning experiences to develop a community service project.

Accompanying the students to today's meeting were Susan Ratajski, second grade teacher at Sharp Elementary School and Nina Rothwell, English teacher at Collingswood High School.

The State Board hosted the Collingswood contingent as part of its recognition program to honor each month a student or group of students for their accomplishments in community service, the arts, academics, sports or other areas.