



Parent to Parent

A Publication of the Parent Resource Center
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www.salem.k12.va.us/salemdiv/parentresource/index.html

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Positive Peer Interactions

With some of the recent media attention being focused on bullying and cyber-bullying, some may think that the need to emphasize bullying prevention programs or the development of positive peer interactions in Salem schools is a new concept. However, Salem City Schools has a history of providing ongoing efforts to promote a safe and emotionally supported learning environment.¹

In this article, we will give just a few examples of recently added ways Salem students are made to feel part of a welcoming school environment. This is in addition to the individualized attention and many services available to students throughout the school system each and every school day.

Salem High School and Andrew Lewis Middle School

Talk About It® Salem Schools began using an anonymous reporting system, 'Talk About It®, at the middle and high schools in February. Students can use the service for any reason, from talking about their own worries, to reporting incidents of bullying or other concerns. Each middle and high school student has been given access information for the service, and can choose which principal, assistant principal, or guidance counselor to send a message. The correspondence is routed through the 'Talk About It ®' system. Sources remain anonymous, and 'Talk About It ®' will only release information about the source to the school if a life or property is believed to be in jeopardy. Students are using 'Talk About It ®', and reviews from students and staff have been positive. For more information on this service, contact your child's guidance counselor, or log

onto the 'Talk About It ®' website, http://www.ancomm.com/about_ancomm/index.html.

Ambassador Program Salem High School initiated the Ambassador Program to make the transition easier for students who are transferring to the high school. The program was started by Ms. Regina Meredith, one of the guidance counselors at Salem High. Although only in its second year, it has already been recognized as an innovative program with an

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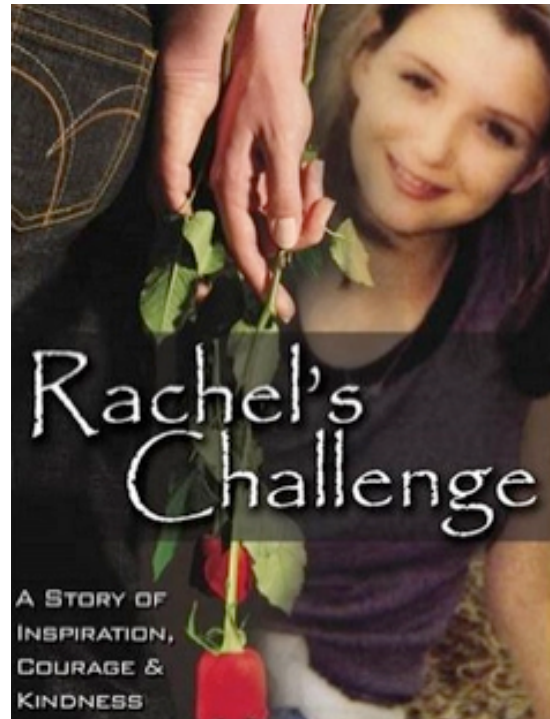


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award from Virginia Tech's School of Education.

The Ambassador Program pairs a student volunteer with a transfer student. The students introduce themselves and plan to meet at lunchtime, so the new student always has a place to sit until he or she builds a wider circle of friends at the school. The priority for pairing is based on having the same lunch and being in the same grade level.

Approximately 100 students transfer to Salem High School each year, the majority within the first two to three months of school. Most of these students are ninth or tenth graders. Ms. Meredith explained, "As adults, we take for granted the struggles new students have when they transfer. They really need peer interaction and we need to provide that. The Ambassador Program is one way that we can provide that support." For more information, contact Ms. Meredith at 387-2437, or by email (rmeredith@salem.12.va.us).



Rachel's Challenge Andrew Lewis Middle School hosted a Rachel's Challenge rally last fall, with the aim of encouraging acts of kindness and compassion in each student. Rachel's Challenge is named after Rachel Scott, who was the first person to be killed in the Columbine High School shootings on April 20, 1999. She was a kind and compassionate person, demonstrating this through her actions to others and writing her thoughts in six diaries. Her family has created a school curriculum based on her writings, and it was implemented by the guidance department this year and is being used throughout the school. This curriculum is centered around five challenges, and aims to help students recognize their purpose in life.

Ms. Farley, one of the counselors at Andrew Lewis Middle School, noted that numerous activities centered around Rachel's Challenge have been started at the school, including a Friends of Rachel Club that helps others at school and in the community, Rachel's

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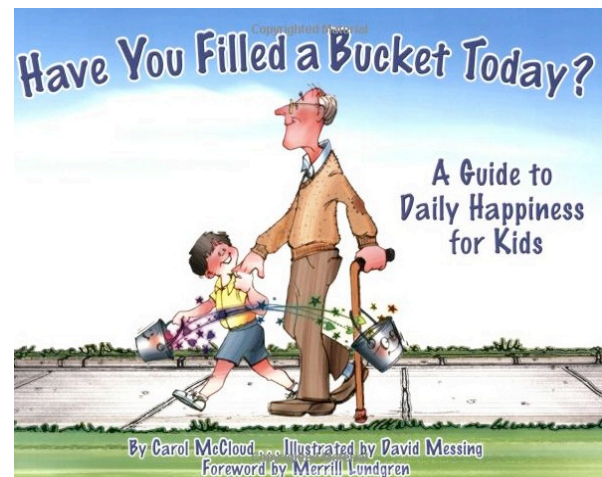
Reporting Boxes for students to report concerns anonymously, starting the day in the morning announcements with a Rachel's Challenge Thought for the Day, and creating a Chain of Kindness. Students and staff at Andrew Lewis have gathered over 600 links to a Chain of Kindness that has been created this year. Teachers write a student's name on a slip of paper for being kind and add it to a paper chain. This chain was joined with chains from schools in Roanoke City, Roanoke County, and Botetourt County at Bandfest 2011 at Northside High School on April 2. Craig Scott, Rachel's brother, was a keynote speaker at the event. For more information on Rachel's Challenge, please contact the Guidance Department at Andrew Lewis Middle School, 387-2513, or log onto www.rachelschallenge.org.

East, G. W. Carver, South, and West Elementary Schools

Bucket Program Guidance counselors at each elementary school began to use Carol McCloud's book, Have You Filled a Bucket Today?, two years ago as part of their curriculum. From the time students enter elementary school, they are taught the terminology to know whether their behavior is a bucket filler or a bucket dipper. Bucket filler behavior brings happiness to oneself and others, and a bucket filling moment can be a "random act of kindness or something someone does without being asked", explained Ms. Sheri Smith, guidance counselor at G. W. Carver Elementary School. The message of the book is that "...we all carry an invisible bucket in which we keep our good thoughts and feelings. When our buckets are full, we are happy; when they

are empty, we are sad. It's important to know that when we fill someone else's bucket, we fill our own, and when we "dip" in someone else's bucket, we dip in our own bucket, too."²

Buckets are in each classroom and, depending on the school, pom poms or marbles are added with each act of kindness that is demonstrated either by individual students or the classroom as a whole. Full buckets gain special recognition for the classroom. The lesson is tied into teaching the pillars of Character Counts, which are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. For more information on the Bucket Program, contact the guidance counselor at your child's school.



Sources

1. Salem School Board Documents (<http://www.boarddocs.com/vsba/slmsdva/Board.nsf/Public>) January 11, 2011
2. Bucket Fillers, Inc. (<http://www.bucketfillers101.com/publications.html>)

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This issue of *Parent to Parent* focuses on Positive Peer Interactions in Salem City Schools. *Parent to Parent* is published three times a year by the Parent Resource Center. If you would like to receive email notifications of community events, please send an email (pmacdonald@salem.k12.va.us) or call Ms. Pat Macdonald at 389-0130. Coordinator hours are Tuesday through Thursday mornings, 8:30-11:50 am. Messages can be left at any time Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm.

Rachel's Five Challenges

- ★ Look for the best in others- eliminate prejudice.
- ★ Dare to dream! Set goals and keep a journal.
- ★ Choose positive influences.
- ★ Use kind words, practice simple acts of kindness and get huge results.
- ★ Start a chain reaction!



More information on Rachel's Challenge can be found on page 2.