

Lincoln School Foundation

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Intentional Teaching of Diversity

By Gretchen PK Covino

Walking through the Smith School lobby, a student noticed one of the first grade students' pictures that was hanging there and, with a big smile said: "Wow, that family has two Dads just like my family has two Moms!" Following a play date with a family of four, a child said to his Mom, "So their family has four people in it and our family has three people."

These were some of the comments made by the Smith School children who viewed the artfully displayed pictures of the families of their school's first grade classes. Led by Smith faculty Matt Reed and Mark McDonough, the first grade teachers created a voluntary project aimed at showcasing and celebrating the families of all of the first grade students. The idea for this project evolved from discussions started by the Smith school's Diversity Focus Group, and it was generously funded by the Lincoln School Foundation.

"Diverse" might not be the first word that comes to some people's minds when describing the town of Lincoln and Lincoln School student body. But our students do come from quite varied backgrounds and family structures when one looks just at the number of members, age, ethnicity, and gender composition. Lincoln School, Grades K-4 has been working with the ideas and materials from *Welcoming Schools* (www.welcomingschools.org).

One of the themes of *Welcoming Schools* is the importance of students learning about and respecting diverse families. As they clearly state on their website, "Family is the most basic element of self-identification for young children; it shapes and informs their sense of self and who they are in the world. It is important for students to see their families reflected in the world around them, while at the same time seeing the diversity of families that also exists in our communities."

The first grade teachers felt strongly that this project would allow for the "intentional teaching" of diversity. They wanted to stimulate conversations and thinking while also giving their students the opportunity to celebrate who they are. The success of the

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program, Matt Reed said, is in part in knowing that the children can look and see they are part of a larger community, and that they fit in, regardless of how their family looks. Additionally, the conversations that the exhibit generates will make it successful.

Each first grade class had the opportunity to spend time talking about the exhibit with their teacher and then time viewing the pictures. “Everyone up there is a family,” Mr. Reed told his class. “I want you to look at the pictures and write down what you think makes up a family...how are they the same, how are they different?”

At first, the children had a hard time understanding the instructions. “What are we supposed to do?” they asked. After further explanation and closed mouths and open eyes, it became apparent:

“Some families are big and some are small.”

“Some families are black and some white.”

“Some families have 2 dads and 2 moms.”

“Some people have one parent and some have two parents.”

“Some families have dogs.”

“If one person gets hurt, then another will come to help.”

“Some are tall and some are short.”

“Families love each other.”

“Families have kids.”

Back in the room, the children had the opportunity to share and discuss their insights about the pictures. Teachers posed questions about what they noticed, how families appeared the same or different, and what makes a family.

The conversations and comments overheard in the hallway and in the classroom show clearly that the project was a success! And those conversations and the lessons learned do not end there. The exhibit is now set up outside the Brooks Auditorium so the children in grades 5-8 can reflect and have their own conversations. Says the team, “With myriad possibilities for curriculum connections at all grade levels, this exhibit would help to start a discussion about the need to learn about and respect others, especially those who seem different from ourselves.” Please make some time to visit the exhibit for your own reflection.

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About the LSF – Grants from the Lincoln School Foundation enrich the curriculum, extend professional development, and build partnerships between the schools and the community. Since its inception in 1988, the Lincoln School Foundation (LSF) has established a proud tradition of awarding community-raised funds to faculty and school administrators who strive for educational excellence in the Lincoln and Hanscom schools.

Our Mission – The Lincoln School Foundation is dedicated to supporting the students, faculty, and administration of the Lincoln Schools by awarding privately-funded grants which enrich the curriculum, extend professional development, and enhance the school and community partnership.

How we differ from the PTO – The LSF enables our teachers and staff to reach beyond traditional programs and uncover new and innovative tools and techniques to bring to the classroom. LSF grants provide the seed money to make these programs a reality. The PTO plays an important role in funding long-standing programs that have become core elements in the curriculum, yet fall outside the school's operating budget. Together, these two organizations provide tremendous resources for our school community.