



**ROMEO
COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS**

GOOD NEWS ACROSS 'R' DISTRICT

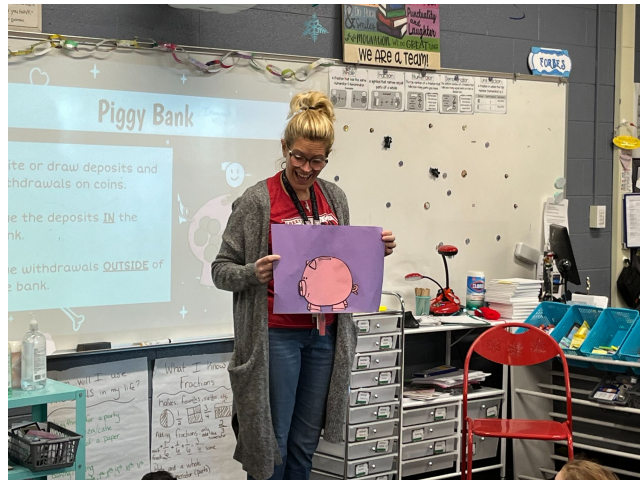
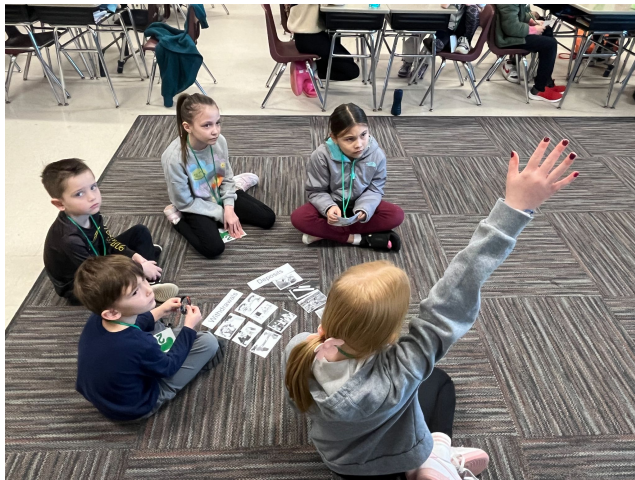
March 1, 2024

Dog Dens create sense of community

Dog Dens, on hiatus during the pandemic, have returned this year to Indian Hills Elementary School.

On Friday, February 23, students enjoyed their third Dog Den meeting. Dog Dens are small groups of kindergarten through fifth grade students led by a staff member. In fact, every adult on staff – with the exception of the administrative assistant, who mans the front desk during the meetings – is assigned to one of these small groups.

“It’s been really exciting because the whole purpose of Dog Dens is to build this sense of community across the school,” said Indian Hills Principal Lisa Wujczyk. “Kids who wouldn’t normally connect with one another and kids who wouldn’t normally connect with particular adults get that opportunity to make those connections.”



The group remains together throughout the year – and across the years. For example, next year students will remain in the same den, with the exception of the fifth graders who will move on to middle school. New kindergarteners will join in, along with any other new students.

“It helps to build that greater sense of community across the school so that when kids see each other in the hallways, they say: “I know you from Dog Dens,” Mrs. Wujczyk explained.

This is the case when they see teachers as well, increasing their sense of comfort wherever they are in the school building.



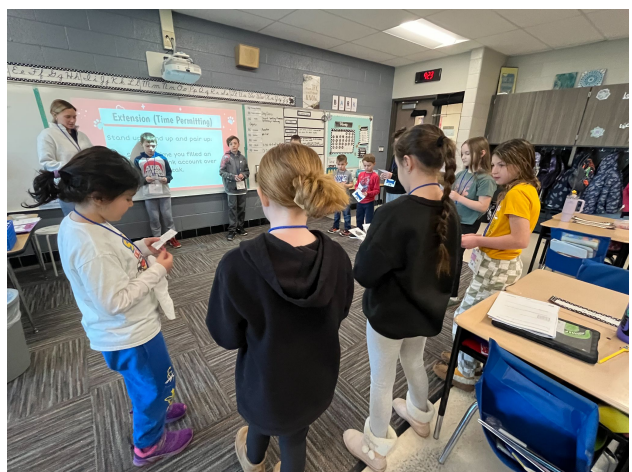
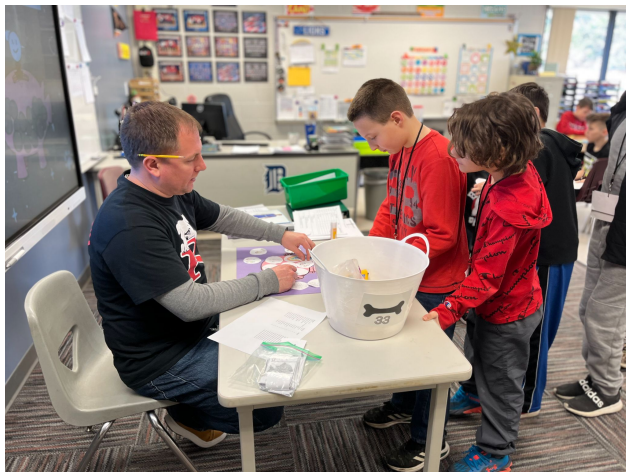
At each Dog Den meeting, there are activities designed that align with that month's focus. For example, February's focus was emotional bank accounts, a part of Leader In Me in which good things that happen are deposits and bad things that happen are withdrawals.

For fourth grader Victoria Girard, an emotional deposit is when somebody sits on the buddy bench and a student sits with them and plays with them.

For third grader Elyas Almontesar, a deposit is being nice to others and helping other students, while a withdrawal is being unkind and not letting others play.

The focus is introduced at the beginning of the month during student-led assemblies known as Bulldog Roundups. For example, during February's Bulldog Roundup, the students introduced the concept of an emotional bank account. Then the teachers lead activities and lessons in their morning Leader In Me progression, in which they discussed emotional bank accounts at different grade levels. This continued as part of the Dog Den lesson.

"There's always a nice connection across our monthly focus to build that common language across the school," Mrs. Wujczyk said.



She added that one of the things she most appreciates about the Leader In Me process is how the leadership is shared across the school, with different leadership teams helping to develop the different lessons and focal points. For example, the staff lighthouse team works to develop the

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monthly focus and then the Dog Dens action team, made up of four staff members, develops the lesson. Finally, the student lighthouse team creates the assembly.

March's focus is Leader In Me Habit 5: Seek first to understand, then to be understood, which will be introduced at the next Bulldog Roundup.

"It all connects!" said Mrs. Wujczyk. "The connection points are important because that's how we are overall building a sense of community and overall common language."



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