

Have You Heard?

H.B du Pont Middle School and Thomas McKean High School have been named the 2017-2018 Outstanding Middle and High School Chapters of the Year by Best Buddies Delaware.

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The H.B. and McKean chapters received the honor of being recognized as number one in the state because of their high level of student involvement at both the school and state levels. Their engaging activities, friendships and involvement have helped change the school culture to become more inclusive.

“Best Buddies means everything to H.B.,” said Principal Jason Bastianelli. “It’s a huge part of who we are. The empathy it creates, as well as the lifelong friendships, are unparalleled.”

Both schools were honored in July at the Best Buddies Leadership Conference at Indiana University. Hayley Miller, Best Buddies student leader, represented McKean.

On September 5, 2018, H.B. students and their Meadowood buddies watched as Tom Waite, Director of Best Buddies Delaware, presented a plaque to last year’s program coordinator, Sara Brady. Next week, Holly Schnittger, Best Buddies advisor at McKean, will accept the award.

Best Buddies is a global nonprofit organization that helps students with disabilities make lifelong friendships, become leaders, secure rewarding jobs and live independently. Founded in 1989 by Anthony Kennedy Shriver, the Best Buddies organization has grown from one chapter to nearly 2,500 chapters worldwide, positively impacting the lives of over 1.2 million people. Participants come from all 50 states and over 50 countries.

There are eight formal programs – middle schools, high schools, colleges, promoters, citizens, ambassadors, jobs and e-buddies. In all of the programs volunteers are paired with a buddy with a disability and provide them with friendship and mentoring and opportunities for socialization.

Together the students in the Best Buddies programs at H.B. and McKean participate in activities including sports, cooking, crafts gardening and field trips. While the middle school program is centered on teacher created activities, the high school program is more student driven. No matter what the activity, the 1:1 interaction and relationships that are built are the most important part. The students establish strong bonds that continue throughout the years.

At H.B., students came in on their own time over the summer to visit their Meadowood buddies going to summer school there. “That’s how passionate they are about the program, and how much they care about their peers,” said Bastianelli.

The program benefits both groups of students. “I love the program,” said Lauren Duffy, an 8th grader at H.B., who said her buddy has been talking more since they were paired. “She’s awesome and one of my best friends. I don’t think about it any other way.”

The state director said that is the crux of the program. “Best Buddies is all about not looking at our differences, but looking at the things we have in common,” he said.

At H.B. and McKean the connection between buddies is strong. The students look forward to the time they spend together and the activities they participate in. Through the efforts of Best Buddies, bridges of respect and friendship are being built.