



THE WREA FOUNDATION

The Charitable Arm of the
Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association

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RELEASE IMMEDIATELY

PARKVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL'S "PEER MENTOR CLUB" PROGRAM

WINS WISCONSIN RETIRED EDUCATORS' ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION AWARD

Ashwaubenon, WI -- Parkview Middle School (Ashwaubenon) and Special Education Teacher Vanessa Talus, have been awarded \$2,000 by the Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association (WREA) Foundation. The award was given to support the school's "Peer Mentor Club" program.

The Peer Mentor Club was piloted during the 2014-15 school year with a few targeted students with Autism and a handful of mentors. The goal was to assist students on the Autism spectrum who had difficulties with academics and social skills.

The program started modestly and grew in the first year to include 10 Autistic students and 31 mentors. Mentors are now being formally trained and have been given resources and strategies on how to assist with academic and social supports. "We taught them how to use visuals and other supports in the classrooms. It was an amazing success," said Ms. Talus.

The process started with informing students about the peer mentoring club, and having them fill out applications that required them to answer thought-provoking questions. From there peer mentors were trained in one-hour sessions over lunch periods.

"With the help of our school counselor, we were able to cross-check schedules and pair up mentors and mentees in various classes, so that each mentor knew who they could help in each class," Ms. Talus said. "Our mentors check in with the Special Education teachers once a month to review how things are going."

Parents of both mentors and mentees have emailed the school to express how much their child loves being part of this opportunity. Teachers have expressed enthusiasm about the things happening in their classrooms and feel the mentors are making a positive difference.

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The financial award is part of an annual "Challenge Award" program sponsored by the WREA Foundation. It recognizes five schools each year, in each of the five statewide regional districts that comprise WREA. From year to year, the awards are rotated from elementary schools, to middle schools, to high schools, every third year.

Parkview Middle School is one of five innovative middle school programs to be awarded \$2,000 this year, for a total of \$10,000 donated by the WREA Foundation. The other programs awarded were Lac du Flambeau Public School (Lac du Flambeau), Edgar Public School (Edgar), Riverside Middle School (Watertown), and Black Hawk Middle School (Madison).

~~The WREA and the WREA Foundation are independent, non-profit organizations representing more than 12,000 retired educators across the state of Wisconsin. Their primary focus is to support and protect the retirement interests and needs of its members, and to advocate for public schools. Both organizations are located at 6405 Century Avenue, Suite 201, Middleton, WI 53562.~~

WREA, which was organized in 1951, is a statewide association of more than 12,000 members and 62 local units. It is recognized for protecting the public pension fund, promoting public education, and providing member benefits. With a central office in Middleton, WREA maintains a strong lobbying presence to represent the views of the retired educational community.