

# Macomb Township school promotes inclusion with benches



Sequoyah Elementary School recently installed Buddy Benches with the help of Home Depot volunteers. Photo courtesy of HEATHER BATKO

By Nicole Tuttle, For The Macomb Daily



Buddy Benches were installed at Sequoyah Elementary School in Macomb Township in December 2015.

The benches at Sequoyah Elementary School don't bear plaques dedicated in memory of anyone. Instead they are emblazoned with "Buddy Bench" to show they promote a sense of inclusion for everyone.

Two Buddy Benches were installed at the Macomb Township elementary school in December 2015, according to Sequoyah/Cheyenne Elementary Schools Assistant Principal Heather Batko. The benches are utilized by students seeking friends, according to the January/February issue of the school's newsletter. New students, those seeking to make new friends and those whose friends aren't at school on a particular day or students who want to play at something different than the rest of their companions are encouraged to utilize the benches. Students not using the benches are encouraged to invite classmates using the benches to join them.

The idea for the benches was inspired by a former student in February 2015, according to Batko. The student had moved outside of the district to Rochester, and returned to visit Sequoyah Elementary School Principal Ted Zotos.

“...She just wanted to let him know how things were going, and told him about a Buddy Bench in Rochester. It sounds like as soon as she utilized the bench, it helped her to meet new friends,” Batko said.

Zotos then sent an e-mail to teacher Angela Dagati, who sponsored the school’s student council at the time, explaining the Buddy Bench concept and asking if the council would support obtaining some at Sequoyah. The concept of the benches fits in with the character-building program initiated in the school last year, based around author Jon Gordon’s “The Energy Bus for Kids” book and the positive energy promoting philosophies it endorses, according to Batko.

“We also have the ‘Energy Bus’ at Sequoyah,” she said. “One of the rules is no bullies allowed, and another is love your passengers.”

The student council’s efforts were joined with the school’s PTO.

“Student council fundraises all year long and so does the PTO. At a March PTO meeting the PTO donated their funds...” Batko said.

The Cole family, which has a student at Sequoyah, also made a donation towards the benches, Batko added.

To get the benches installed, Batko reached out to the manager of a Home Depot location on Hall Road.

“When I called, he did not even hesitate. They were happy to help out with it. The crew of volunteers went together to donate the installation material. The benches had to be mounted to the ground and they donated material and labor,” Batko said.

In December 2015 and early January 2016, K-5 teachers took their students out to the Buddy Benches to explain their purposes and tie them in with lessons related to “The Energy Bus for Kids,” according to Batko.