

Madison West Class of '61 Education Foundation

22 December 2016

Wishing everyone a Happy Holiday!

No...this isn't a repeat of the November letter!!

We wanted to give you a short review of the recent **Respect Retreat held at WEST** the week of December 7.

Several of our classmates attended and sent along some observations and photos. We were also pleased to receive comments from a parent of one of the Freshman attending...that is what we really like to see!



The Class of '61 Education Foundation contributed \$13000 this year....the highest level ever due to the cut backs in school funding and ending of grants. We are now reaching out to other classes to help in this great mission.

You really are making a difference!

Close to 600 Freshman, 50 Senior Mentors, several teachers and administrators plus Class of '61 alums (Peggy Ahlgren, Jeff Bartell, David Walsh, Donna McDowell Beestman, Ralph Farmer, Judy Berrigan Aubey and Peter Krug - Class of '62).

Here are some of the observations...

Judy Berigan Aubey gave an insightful recap....

"Youth Frontiers staff were superb, mixing physical activities (singing, dancing) with small groups led by senior mentors. While it took a little time to transition to quiet from active activities, these seniors showed real skill in getting quiet participation and active listening. Faculty, staff and YF staff rounded up or persistently encouraged those kids who were "outliers", hanging back from participation by choice or inability. Of the latter group, there were three noticeable kids who clearly had different levels of capability for participation. But even they, after backing away at intervals, could be seen trying to engage. And their freshman colleagues seemed very accepting of them, even if their behavior was mildly disruptive at times.



Mitch, the Van Hise vice principal (One of the Freshman groups) and Jeremy, the staffer assigned to assist with the program, played "catcher in the rye", as some students tried to do a flier from time to time. They gently and persistently moved kids away from the door and closer to the group.

The closing campfire was very interesting with students making thoughtful and emotional responses to the challenge from YF staff to work on self, work to help others or stand up to challenges. At times, it was hard to remain just an observer during the day, as you just wish so much for these kids as they march towards their adult lives. And it has substantial resonance for me as I see my own granddaughter going forward with her freshman life at Memorial. I hope there are similar resources for her there.

A great program and a wonderful investment by the Class of '61."

Jeremy Thornton, the Coordinator of Student Engagement (our main contact) relayed....

“Since the Retreat, I've noticed an increase in positive interactions between our freshman students in the hallways. Students are utilizing the information that they learned while in the retreat to build stronger relationships with their peers. Although this was a one day event, it would seem that the Respect Retreats will continue to affect our 2016 freshman class in a positive way.”

Jeff Bartell, who has attended all the Retreats, observed...

“As always, the “campfire” at the end of the afternoon, when they turn down the lights, light a candle in the middle of a circle of the students, and ask them to come forward, one at a time, to reflect on the concept of “respect,” was a very moving scene. Some of the student responses were particularly thoughtful and meaningful, and I believe influenced others to think about respect in a way they hadn’t before. So glad that Dave (Walsh) and Peter (Krug) attended and were impressed. Yes, it would be nice to keep the ball rolling.”



Donna McDowell Beestman concurred on the “campfire”....

“The ‘campfire’ was again a moving experience for students - and for us observers.”

Ralph Farmer, another veteran observer, mentioned he decided to sit in with a group and found it very inspiring. He has loved attending the Retreats to watch the students involvement. Ralph encouraged some students to join in the activities who seemed to be sneaking a look at their cell phones (surprise??).

Dave Walsh wrote, I attended the retreat on Friday. Very interesting. There were a number of teachers observing. The ones I spoke with, including the principal think it is a good idea. I hope we can continue it but we will probably need a partner. Jay and I spoke with Peter Krug about help from his class. He observed on Thursday and spoke with the facilitator. He was impressed. Hopefully, his class will help.

And, a parent...Andrea Gambaro-Gunn, “My freshman son had the opportunity to participate in this retreat last week. It was incredibly powerful and impactful to him...I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and the staff at West High for providing this opportunity to the students, Youth Frontiers is an amazing organization doing important work, Thank you for bringing that to your students.”



To contribute.....send checks to:

Foundation for Madison Public Schools

101 Nob Hill Road, Suite 300

Madison, WI 53713

Please note on check - "Madison West Class of '61 Education Fund"

Thanks for all you have done!!

Robin, Peggy and Jeff

Rnallinj@gmail.com jbbartell@aol.com Pahlgren@merr.com

Photos from the 2016 West Freshmen Respect Retreat



Senior group leaders start "caught in the middle" game.



Small groups, lead by a senior, talk & discuss topics provided by YF.



Eager, listening: most interested and ready for adventure.



Rock - Paper - Scissors



The giant chair begins to form.



Youth Frontier leaders



Lunch from Jason's Deli ham or turkey sandwiches



Hard to capture in photos the noise, the screams, the burps, singing, line dancing, art contests or the quiet of the campfire where they decide:
 1) Will I treat myself better, 2) not judge other people or 3) stand up and help when I see some one being bullied.



Leaders & teachers spend one on one time with those who had difficulty joining the group.



"The wall" group of non-joiners.