



Springer Middle is Leading the Way

BARK Builders program helps emerging leaders shine BY CLAIRE ARMANN

STRONG LEADERS are hard to come by. At Springer Middle School (SMS) from the Brandywine School District, students are encouraged to practice leadership skills and expand on what it really means to be a leader through the BARK Builder program.

The BARK Builders program guides students who have shown potential to be great leaders through student government or student ambassador program. Being a BARK Builder allows unique opportunities and practical experiences to hone those special skills that all good leaders inhibit.

BARK stands for Best effort, Academic achievement, Responsible actions and Kind gestures, all values that align with the principles of

SMS. Created 10 years ago, the program has proven to be influential, effective, and well received by both students and parents.

The BARK Builders program has many committees dedicated to implementing the core values of SMS, such as peer tutoring, peer mediation, posters, spirit week and fundraising. Through the tutoring program, during the 2017-2018 3rd marking period, 100% of students passed ELA, with 73% earning a C or above and 100% passed math with 87% earning a C or above. Peer mediation is a particularly special program that allows BARK Builders to act as moderators for disagreements among fellow students. Administrators rely on these students in

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certain situations, as having a fellow student mediate an argument can be more effective than a teacher.

The program also works on creating anti-bullying strategies, influencing positive behavior in and out of the classroom, academic support for other students and community service projects. At the end of the day, these students act as role models for their peers by positively influencing the school environment and creating lasting impressions on their community.

This application-based program only accepts 40-50 seventh and eighth grade students each year out of 100 applicants. After submitting an application, which includes a student essay and teacher recommendation, accepted students attend two summer sessions to prepare them for the upcoming year. The summer sessions include training for the various committees and community service projects. This is an opportunity for students to show administrators their dedication to the program and begin their path to being excellent student leaders.

Throughout the year BARK Builders are required to complete community service and serve on a committee. Service projects range from car washes to donating and delivering food and gifts to disadvantaged families in their school during the holidays.

The program's popularity is due to the impact these students make on each other and the parents. A BARK Builder who has been a part of the program for two years said, "Being part of BARK Builders, gives me a sense of accomplishment by performing community service and being a voice for other students." Parents of students in the program are incredibly supportive. Over the years, parents will have more than one student go through the program because they are so impressed by the outcome. The program is effective in its execution and continues to grow in its scope of community service activities and committees each year. The support the program has is vital to its success.

By allowing students to put their leadership skills to practice, they are learning life long lessons on the impact that they can have on those around them. ■



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