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Pleasant Prairie students celebrate national honor

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PLEASANT PRAIRIE — Kids at Pleasant Prairie Elementary School know how to celebrate.

So when students at the school learned at an assembly Friday that their school was named a National School of Character they shouted their approval. Loudly. And gleefully. And then they danced.

The school, with about 600 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, has focused on character education as a key component of what school staff calls the Pleasant Prairie Way.

Earlier this school year, Pleasant Prairie was named a State School of Character by Character.org, an organization that promotes character development in schools and communities. Earlier this week, Principal Shane Gayle was notified that the school was named a National School of Character, one of 68 schools to receive the award nationwide.

Gayle surprised students with the award at an assembly Friday following a monthly recognition that honors kids at the school with hallway “high fives” from all of the students and staff.

“You have made me so proud because you have shown good character,” Gayle told the students. “You have made me so proud because you have tried your hardest. You have made me so proud because you have constantly made good decisions.”

Pleasant Prairie began focusing on promoting character education eight years ago, working on lessons about integrity and responsibility as well as reading and math. He said staff focuses on encouraging positive behavior, rather than on negative discipline.

The president of the national organization visited Pleasant Prairie recently as part of the process of choosing national award winners. According to a statement from Character.org, schools were chosen based on programs that had a positive impact on academic achievement, student behavior and school climate. They also look for schools that give students “opportunities for moral action,” foster shared leadership, and engage families and communities.

Gayle said the focus on character, and a focus on recognizing positive behavior, has pervaded the school’s culture. “This is who we are,” he said.

That has paid off in a more positive school culture, fewer discipline issues, and strong academic progress. School staff say they regularly hear from parents about the impact lessons on character have had on their kids at home.

Kenosha Unified Superintendent Sue Savaglio-Jarvis said the award highlights the partnership the school has built with families and the community. “I’m so proud of the work they have done here,” she said, especially praising Gayle’s work. “He’s built this, along with his great staff.”

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