

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

September 13, 2021

PENN*LINK

TO: School District Superintendents
School District Special Education Directors
Intermediate Unit Executive Directors
Intermediate Unit Special Education Directors
Charter School Chief Executive Officers
Charter School Special Education Directors

FROM: Carole L. Clancy, Director
Bureau of Special Education

SUBJECT: 2021-22 Inclusive Programming Opportunities through Mikayla's Voice

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education announces inclusive programming for the 2021-2022 school year. Mikayla's Voice offers original programming to help build a positive and equitable school culture and ensure the well-being of your staff and students. Every student should feel valued and welcome in their school community ~ and understand that it's their responsibility to help others to feel the same!

Two Inclusion Assemblies:

Two school-wide inclusion assemblies are held in which the book *Our Friend Mikayla* is shared. One of the presenters is a student or young adult with a disability who also shares their personal story. Questions will be encouraged and honest answers and discussions will occur about having a friend with a disability. Each presentation concludes with an invitation for all students to serve as Mikayla's "Voice."

Inclusion Books:

Mikayla's Voice has published three children's books written and illustrated by kids for other kids about having a friend with a disability. Mikayla was born with a brain injury, Jeffrey has Down syndrome, and Brady is challenged by autism, but the books are not about the main characters or their disabilities. They are about friendship and kindness. Two of each are provided for your school library:

- *Our Friend Mikayla*
- *High Fives and A Big Heart*
- *Super Brady ~ Always on the Move!*

Wheels of Friendship®:

Wheels of Friendship is our unique art program that allows children to paint not with brushes, but with the wheels of a wheelchair (or walker) and the paws (and tail) of a service dog. Having started with a focus on the inclusion of people with physical disabilities, the program has expanded to represent and include people with different disabilities. We incorporate sign language into projects including artists who are deaf or hearing impaired. When working with artists with visual challenges, we add interesting textures, incorporate braille, and have even had artists to paint with their friend's mobility cane.

Artwork Unveiling and Installation:

Once complete, artists help unveil their large-scale collaborative artwork and share its message with the entire school community, before it is permanently installed in their school as a reminder to celebrate diversity and promote equity and inclusion.

Mikayla's Bookshelf Enrichment Website:

"Mikayla's Bookshelf" includes electronic versions of all three books making it easier to share them with all classes, students, and families. But the books are just the foundation upon which we have built enrichment lessons for teachers to introduce and/or reinforce Mikayla's Voice message and mission with their students. All lessons are:

- Related to the themes of inclusion, kindness, and friendship.
- In the subject areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Music, Physical Education, Science, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and the Visual Arts.
- Addressing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies.
- Aligned to PA State Core Standards.
- Including Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies.
- With direct links to supplemental support information and technical assistance as needed.

Participating schools are asked to help with pre and post data collection to measure the global quality of the programs and their ability to improve school culture and community. Mikayla's Voice has partnered with researchers at Lehigh University as part of our ongoing program assessment for improvement and replication.

Interested schools can contact Rita Cheskiewicz, Executive Director at 570-690-7113 or rita@mikaylasvoice.org or Kimberly Resh, Program Director, at 610-746-2324 or kim@mikaylasvoice.org to participate in Mikayla's Voice programming.

Mikayla's Voice website can be found at www.mikaylasvoice.org.

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