

Students at Keister Successfully Advocate for More Swings

By MEGAN WILLIAMS Daily News-Record

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HARRISONBURG — If you ask a group of elementary school students to make a request of their teachers and administrators on behalf of their peers, it's most likely going to have something to do with recess.

A group called the Keister Ambassadors was formed last year at Keister Elementary School to give students a voice and allow them to advocate for themselves.

"They learn that they have a voice and as a student, get things done in a right way given the right avenue," said Principal Julie Zook.

The group of fourth- and fifth-graders last year came up with the school's motto "Kindness Shines at Keister" and had T-shirts made for students and families.

But the group last year had another request — more swings on the playground. Unfortunately there wasn't enough money in the budget to purchase additional swings last year.

But this year, the request was made again. The need for swings has been great at Keister, Zook said.

Previously there were only six swings and more than one class would often be on the playground at any given time. The wait for swinging was long, so the Ambassadors took up the cause.

In addition, the fifth-graders started a petition this year to get more swings, which Zook said was done in a courteous and professional manner.

Zook expressed the students' request to the school board to see if funding was available this year. Thanks to leftover funds at the end of the last fiscal year, the request for more swings was approved.

This week the swings went in, doubling the number available.

Fifth-grader Molly Ludwig was among the group of students to help get the new swings.

“We make sure that other kids get what they need,” she said.

Fellow fifth-grader Daniel Lopez said it’s been “cool” being a part of the ambassadors and he wished they could meet more often.

The group of ambassadors is something that Zook has created at different schools during her 20 years as a building principal. She previously worked as an administrator in Waynesboro. “If you give kids a voice, they realize and learn that they can make a difference,” Zook said.

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