

LTEC adopts school bus behavior plan



STAFF PHOTO/PAT FARNELLI Trail Elementary Principal Brian Kelly holds a large "Bus of the Month" magnet which includes winning artwork by fourth grade student Emma Fowler. The magnet will be attached each month to the bus which gets the most high fives for student passenger behavior, and the driver and riders will be awarded with a special breakfast for winning months.

Lackawanna Trail elementary students have launched an ambitious plan to improve student transportation experiences by following a few basic rules of behavior.

Elementary Center principal Brian Kelly said that he is modeling positive outreach and reinforcement for the primary school teachers by calling home with reports of good deportment on the school buses, or other examples of citizenship.

"We've got a couple of exciting things going, and we are striving to put a positive swing on this," Kelly said Monday morning. "When I was hired for this position, the burning issue that the superintendent wanted me to address was our students' behavior while on the bus."

Kelly, who began his tenure as elementary principal last July 1, said that when he reviewed bus discipline referrals for bus-related incidents, he noticed an alarming trend over the past five years.

There was a significant, yearly increase in unsafe and/or inappropriate behavior during bus rides to and from school over this time period, he said.

Kelly noted that the school had begun discussing this through several forums: faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and meetings with bus drivers and owners."

"We agreed that getting students engaged and excited to behave would be our approach to solving this issue," he said. "We decided that rewarding a bus each month for positive behavior was the most appropriate approach to solve the bus behavior issues."

So he mapped out a plan to have the elementary students adopt five very basic rules, which form an acronym for T-R-A-I-L:

Talk quietly to peers using inside voices.

Remain seated while the bus is moving (keep hands and feet inside bus at all times).

Always be kind and courteous to others (keep hands and feet to yourself).

Inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated (verbal, physical or possession of inappropriate object).

Leave bus clean (eating and drinking are not permitted).

To kick off the program, there was a fourth grade art contest on the subject of good bus behavior.

High school students in John Hickok's digital media class shot and edited a video on the subject.

The winner of the art contest was Emma Fowler, 9, of Cobb Hill, which is south of Nicholson.

She thought it would be fun to enter the contest, and had previously won a Fire Safety poster contest for elementary students.

Fowler said that she spent two art classes drawing the school bus, which is driving on a steep paved road toward a rainbow during a sun shower, with a large sun on the left side of the picture while blue raindrops fall overhead.

Fowler does not presently ride a school bus, but takes private transportation to school. However, Emma has been a school bus rider in the past, and was among those who rode the bus while the video was being made.

She said that her parents were really proud of her when they received a phone call from the principal informing them she was the first place artist. She has three brothers, one sister, two dogs, two cats, and a lizard at home.

To prepare for the bus video, a song, "It's all about that bus," to the tune of Meghan Trainor's "All about that bass" hit song, was written, and the bus driver and students sang the jingle while riding to the school and being videotaped.

Kelly said, "This experience was exciting for all of our students and the high school students."

This video was shown throughout the school on Monday, Jan. 5.

"Beginning today, each bus driver will give our staff on duty a daily thumbs up or down if their students followed the five targeted bus rules," Kelly said. "At the end of each month, the bus with the highest number of positive bus rides is the winner. All students riding the bus receive an extra recess with the principal, a special breakfast together with their bus driver, and the Lackawanna Trail Bus of the Month magnet is posted on their bus for the next month."

According to Kelly, the bus drivers are pulling up in the afternoon and talking about how their bus will be the winner each month.

"We had all thumbs up buses this morning," he said. "Students, staff, and parents are talking about this incentive daily. They're excited! Any time we get students engaged and excited to make a positive change, we all win. Our school grows and we get better."

Kelly said that the school bus drivers and staff anticipate this will not only improve bus behavior but also create a safer bus ride to and from school.

Attendance may also improve, as students should look forward to riding to school and are less likely to miss their bus rides or skip a day.

Kelly noted that the school district does not own the buses, and that bus drivers are big stakeholders here when it comes to bus safety.

With student behavior improved, it will be easier for the operators to drive defensively, and to keep their eyes on the road.

To emphasize the program, Kelly said that he is outside with the buses every morning and afternoon, and all of the faculty members go outside to meet the buses.

So far, the Trail Elementary Center buses are not equipped with video cameras, although several operators have installed their own