Brain Buddies program a success at local elementary school

Students have found an exciting new way of learning with the Brain Buddies program at Foot of Ten Elementary School in Duncansville.

Brain Buddies is a program that teams up sixth graders with first graders in an effort to give students a different way of learning.

However, not all sixth graders and first graders are able to be in the program. Students must be in either Diane Vella’s sixth grade class or Mary Petrak’s first grade class and must demonstrate good behavior.

“It’s really something special to be involved in,” said Vella. “We’re the only classes that get to be a part of this.”

Vella and Petrak work diligently to put together an excellent program for their students. Their overall goal is to help both the first and sixth graders in different ways.

“We do role-playing, skits, all different sorts of things,” said Vella. “The first graders help the sixth graders too. They become really comfortable with each other and look out for each other.”

However, Brain Buddies isn’t all fun and games. The sixth graders have to help the first graders with whatever they are doing and help teach them how to do things.

This year’s class has a strong importance for Petrak. “This is a special year for me because some of the sixth graders that are now in Diane’s class were from my first year of doing Brain Buddies here at Foot of Ten,” says Petrak.

One of the sixth graders that were in the program before is Jessica Melusky. “It was really fun when I was in first grade,” said Melusky. “Now it’s cool to be doing the same thing being in Mrs. Vella’s sixth grade.”

Melusky enjoys being a Brain Buddy to first grader Jenee Delerme. “For holidays we get together and do projects,” says Melusky. “For Halloween we went down to their classroom and made ghosts. It’s nice to get a chance to be with each other and have fun.”

Delerme is very happy to be in Petrak’s class and hopes that once she’s in sixth grade she’ll be able to be a Brain Buddy again. “I like being a buddy,” said Delerme. “I want to be in Mrs. Vella’s class so I can do it again.”

Most of the Brain Buddies like Melusky and Delerme. Over the past six years, Vella and Petrak have been able to perfect the way they match the students up with their Brain Buddies. Vella has all of her sixth grade students write an essay about the type of student they want. Afterwards Vella and Petrak sit down and determine what students would work the best together.
“In the past we’ve had to make special arrangement,” said Vella. “We once had a first grader that had recently lost a parent and we wanted to pair that student up with more than one sixth grader. We were able to find a student in my class that had also lost a parent. They were able to work with each other and ended up being a great team.”

Vella and Petrak feel that Brain Buddies is a great program and is very special for their kids. “Foot of Ten is a great family atmosphere where we all grow and care for the kids,” said Petrak. “The administration supports us because they see that it’s such a great program.”

“It’s a lot of work to do but it’s the one thing that we have found that making time for is a priority,” said Vella.

For more information you can contact the Hollidaysburg Area School District at 696-4454.