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Piscataway Students Compete In Scarecrow-Decorating Contest

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Students at Arbor Intermediate School are celebrating the harvest season with a scarecrow-decorating contest and a revamped fall celebration meant to celebrate diversity and inclusiveness.

Each classroom at the school has been hard at work designing their scarecrows. The entries will be voted upon by students and parents, and the winners will receive a pizza party.

"The kids are in a real festive mood," said fifth-grade teacher Pat Matzek. Dhara Patel, 10, was entranced by the excitement, but she pulled herself away long enough to explain how they made the scarecrow.

"First we took a bag and filled it up with shredded paper," she said. "Then we put the dress on."

The scarecrow has a snowman's figure with two bags of shreddings comprising the body and a balloon serving as the head.

Principal Susan Chalfin said this is the first year the school has held a Harvest Celebration and scarecrow-decorating contest. Up until this year, the school celebrated Halloween.

"Over the years, we've been having more and more children who couldn't participate in the parties or the parade," Chalfin said.

Chalfin said many children at her school don't celebrate Halloween, mostly for religious reasons. Parents of those students often asked that their child not participate in Halloween-themed activities at the school.

Last year, the issue came to a head with 52 children not participating, and another 20 or so who didn't come to school or left before the Halloween events. The school has an enrollment of about 520 fourth and fifth graders.

"We didn't like the idea that children couldn't participate in something we did," Chalfin said.

And so, not wanting to take away a celebration without replacing it, the school created the Harvest Celebration.

Chalfin said the event also fits into the history studies of her students. Fourth-grade students study colonial and New Jersey history. Fifth-grade students study American history.

Matzek said her students have embraced the new slate of activities.

"We really took a while deciding what kind of scarecrow," she said. "The only thing was they wanted to do it in class. They didn't want anyone to take it home, they wanted the work done in class."

Weather permitting, the scarecrows will be on display in front of the school at 1717 Lester Place on Oct. 30 and 31. If the weather is poor, the scarecrows will be put in the school's foyer, and the school also plans to post photos of the scarecrows on the school's Web site.

Fifth-grade students will vote on the fourth-grade students' scarecrows and vice versa. Parents can also vote at the school.

Matzek's class has named its scarecrow "Glamorous Glenda." The glamour comes chiefly from the scarecrow's dress. Thomas Roberts, 10, has something to do with that. So did his sister. She just doesn't know it.

"It's my sister's dress," he said.

Roberts was asked how his sister reacted when he asked to use the dress for the scarecrow.

"My sister wasn't actually there," he said. "She's at college."

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