

Elizabeth Public School Press Release

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EPS First District in U.S. to Mandate Harmony Power Awards

Sensei John Mirrione to offer professional development; lead school activities during Week of Respect

Elizabeth, N.J., September 3, 2019 – Elizabeth Public Schools has become the first school district in the nation to mandate Harmony Power Awards as part of its character and anti-bullying education programs.

Harmony Power Awards are presented by the Harmony Power Foundation, founded by Sensei John Mirrione with the mission of standing up to bullying and standing for human equality.

The foundation was officially formed in 2015 after several years of Mirrione sharing his personal story at schools and YMCAs of overcoming bullying through self-empowerment, believing in himself, and coming to the realization that anything is possible. The groundwork began in 2010 when Mirrione embarked on a 17-city tour with his own money and through sponsorship from Harmony by Karate, including stops in Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles.

The successful and inspiring message of Harmony Power has led it to become part of an anti-bullying assembly bill pertaining to the Week of Respect, observed the first week of October each year by school districts in recognition of the importance of social and emotional learning and character education.

The bill (A1983), sponsored by New Jersey District 35 Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter, states, “School districts also shall observe the week by presenting character awards, known as ‘Harmony Power’ awards, in each school to students who have demonstrated outstanding character by: helping to prevent harassment, intimidation or bullying; contributing to the creation of a respectful atmosphere in the school; serving as a positive role model for other students; performing community service in the school or community; or demonstrating positive characteristics through art.”

The bill has been introduced and referred to the Assembly Education Committee.

Elizabeth Public Schools has chosen to take the lead to incorporate the Harmony Power Awards into its character and anti-bullying education. The initiative will kick off at all 36 district schools during the Week of Respect with activities promoting harmony, kindness and respect such as anti-bullying class lessons, art projects and contests, community service projects, and music and dance instruction. Various students and staff will receive Harmony Power Awards as a result of their efforts, which are anticipated to be presented at each school towards the end of October into early November. The partnership with Harmony Power and Mirrione to provide anti-bullying and character education activities throughout the school year comes at no additional cost to the schools.

The district has been highly successful in developing its character education program throughout the district. In May, three district schools (Nicholas S. LaCorte – Peterstown School No. 3, Dr. Albert Einstein Academy School No. 29, and Frances C. Smith Early Childhood Center School No. 50) were among 92 schools to be recognized as a 2019 National School of Character by Character.org. Elizabeth Public Schools is now home to seven district schools that have been designated as state schools of character, six of which have gone on to receive national school of character honors.

Elizabeth Public Schools Superintendent Olga Hugelmeyer welcomes the Harmony Power Awards program to the district, believing the message from Mirrione will be beneficial to students and staff alike.

“Harmony Power delivers a powerful and inspirational message about the importance of kindness and goodness and how they both can have such a significant impact on our lives,” said Hugelmeyer. “Character education is, and will

continue to be, a point of emphasis in classroom instruction throughout our schools and Sensei John Mirrione's program will undoubtedly be a wonderful asset to our learning community."

Mirrione is scheduled to visit Elmora School No. 12 of Elizabeth Public Schools on Wednesday, September 4 at 1:45 p.m. to provide professional development to district school counselors and social workers through his inspirational message and program that has proven successful. Media members are welcome to attend the event to cover his speech, which is anticipated to be 20-30 minutes in length.

Elizabeth Board of Education President Stephanie G. Pestana is pleased that Harmony Power will continue to work with district students and staff members this coming school year.

"Young boys and girls yearn for lessons and activities that help them realize the strength they possess within themselves to achieve success and positively connect with others," said Pestana. "Harmony Power has already had a great impact on our students and team members through its message of empowerment and and I look forward to more students being motivated and inspired by Sensei John Mirrione."

For further information on Elizabeth Public Schools, please visit www.epsnj.org