Norrix Focuses on Positive Behaviors with New Points of Emphasis

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Editor-in-Chief

In an effort to encourage positive behavior both in and out of school, Loy Norrix has introduced several new points of emphasis for this school year. Positive Behavior Support, or PBS, is a method used generally in elementary or middle schools to encourage positive behavior by rewarding students who act appropriately. Administrators at LN have introduced the acronym BLUE (Be there, Be ready, Live Responsibly, Uphold Respect and Integrity, Embrace Education) as the school's "personalized offshoot" of PBS, in hopes of promoting a positive environment for all students at Norrix.

Principal David LaPrairie believes that BLUE presents an opportunity for students and staff to share a common point of reference when it comes to what types of behaviors are acceptable at school.

"BLUE has been introduced at Norrix so that staff and students will be able to speak a common language. I believe it will really help to have a common reference point that emphasizes what positive behaviors students should display," said LaPrairie.

For the past few years LN has engaged in a consistent struggle with students who display inappropriate behaviors for the school environment. In the past, these problems have forced administrators to implement policies that restrict privileges for all students, regardless of if they are creating problems or not, such as when the senior courtyard was closed in the past due to bad choices among some of the students.

This year administrators and staff intend to reward all students who are displaying positive behavior and to make sure that every student knows exactly what type of behaviors are appropriate for the school environment.

EMILY ROONEY/KNIGHT LIFE

In a spoof from "Got Milk?" teacher Sveri Stromsta May, shines bright with blue for her school. May's actions have always made a great example of what it means to be a member of LN and what it means to live by "Blue."

Asst. Principal Valerie Boggan, for the PIE/Bridges/Reclaiming Center at LN, is confident that BLUE will elicit a positive response from students.

"I am hoping it (BLUE) will not only minimize poor choices and destructive behaviors, but that it will also increase student pride, community involvement, and ultimately increase academic success," said Boggan.

BLUE aims to not only reward students who show an improvement in their behavior patterns, but also to celebrate those students who consistently make good choices and demonstrate positive behavior.

"BLUE allows us an opportunity to uniformly celebrate students. Whether we are talking about a student who makes poor, ok, or awesome decisions, they all want to be celebrated. BLUE gives students the right to take pride in their school and enjoy being a student here," said Boggan.

As far as rewards that students can expect, LaPrairie states that there will be prizes and drawings similar to those presented by the Renaissance program of last year, as well as other yet to be disclosed rewards. Additionally, to further encourage students to uphold BLUE, posters will be hung around the school highlighting some of the slogans associated with BLUE. These slogans include, "We Support our BLUE," and "Got BLUE?"

Boggan believes that for BLUE to be successful at LN, students must also be involved in supporting it and presenting it to their peers. Students have the opportunity to join the Renaissance Council, where they will be given an "outlet for their views and a chance to give their input about BLUE and other matters," said LaPrairie.

Students can also express their support of BLUE by making good choices. Senior Marleigh Hill is one student who has become involved in introducing BLUE at our school, and she believes it will help in bringing about change in our school.

"BLUE gives students an easy way to remember how you're supposed to act in school. I really hope that it will be effective because I believe some of the students at our school would benefit from learning some of the lessons behind BLUE. Students can help promote BLUE by knowing what it stands for, and asking students who are not acting appropriately to uphold the values BLUE is trying to teach them," said Hill.

Another initiative aimed at promoting positive student behavior and relationships to be introduced at LN is peer mentoring. The plan is to pair freshmen students with older students who will act as their mentors and role models. Administrators are working together with Ignite; an agency that specializes in peer mentoring, to lay the foundations for a program at LN. Boggan feels that peer mentoring has the potential to increase student achievement and promote good decisions.

"If students have a solid start in high school it reduces the likelihood that they will drop out by senior year. Peers have more influence on their own peers than adults do, and they may be able to encourage a student to do the right thing in a difficult situation. We really want positive decisions to be contagious at Loy Norrix," said Boggan.

English teacher Anne Bowser has stepped forward to act as the head of the Ignite peer mentoring program at LN. She views peer mentoring as an important step in helping freshmen students successfully adapt to high school.

"The Freshmen Academy is certainly doing what it can academically to ensure their [freshmen students] success, but there are other components to high school. Mentors would help with these other components by presenting lessons dealing with social skills, empathy, and conflict resolution. They would act as an advisor to these students," said Bowser.

Hill is also confident in the ability of peer mentoring to accomplish positive things at LN.

"I think it [peer mentoring] will build a relationship between upperclassmen and freshmen and give freshmen someone they can go to for help and with questions," said Hill.

Bowser said that "there are definitely people interested in changing the environment in our school." And through the combined efforts of BLUE and peer mentoring, administrators and staff have demonstrated that they are taking steps to promote a positive and healthy learning environment for all students. Student involvement in upholding BLUE and assisting in peer mentoring will further encourage their peers to act appropriately and support positive changes in our school.

Be there, be ready | **L**ive responsibly | **U**phold respect & integrity | **E**mbrace education

LN Student and Family Participate in Ramadan

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food occupied the morning breakfast array, just food with plenty of vitamins and minerals.

Nidal Othman talks about what it means to fast. "Remember God in this time, for this is the space during the year that he has given to you to become closer to him, and to seek forgiveness. In order to enhance our connection to Allah we sacrifice something that he has given to us. For a thirty-day period we do not eat until the sun slips behind the horizon. We also give up smoking, sexual activities, anything that would appear inappropriate in this holy time. This is a time for you to ask god for anything and everything. A time to purify the heart and soul, at the end of Ramadan you go through a re-birth. It is the time to ask for forgiveness," said Nidal.

> "Every year I go to Jerusalem to visit the Dome of Rock, which is where the Prophet Muhammad left this earth on the night journey to be with God. After this I become more in touch and closer to God"
>
> -Nidal Othman

Saffa explains who is allowed to participate in Ramadan. "All Muslims must participate. The exceptions are anyone who cannot fast for medical or health reasons. You start after you are in puberty, so around 10 or 12," said Saffa.

Being in a public school does not present a problem for Saffa. "I have been participating in Ramadan for so long it is easy now. If I ever feel like I cannot go on, I just ask God for help and he gives it to me," she said.

After Ramadan, its participants take part in a holiday called Eidilfites, which is during the month after fasting. The Fourth Pillar is "the giving of Alms"

Saffa Othman describes with deep pride and love, the meaning of Eidilfites. "It coincides with the Fourth Pillar. It is a time where you are thankful for what you have and you will give to charity, which benefits families in need all over the nation. In some countries you will give a certain amount of your paycheck because we all must take care of each other," said Saffa.

Nidal Othman ties in the Fourth Pillar to the span of a Muslim's life. "The entire point of life is to serve God and only him, you do everything to please him. On Judgment day we are all resurrected and we give to god our book of deeds. Allah doesn't care about materialistic things. All Allah cares about is how you have served God and how you have given to others and what significance you have given to the world he created. If you live through the teachings of the Koran you can do no wrong." There will never be any description of God, a human will never see him, but he is always with you.

Similar to Christians, Muslims believe that God is all seeing all hearing and he is always present. He is the creator of everything and foresees every "path" before it is created.

Later Nidal shares that the hardships he faces being a Muslim in America temporarily draws him away from his faith.

"Not that many people are Muslim around Kalamazoo. The temptation to sin weighs heavy on my shoulders. Every year I go to Jerusalem to visit the Dome of Rock, which is where the Prophet Muhammad left this earth on the night journey to be with God. After this I become more in touch and closer to God," said Nidal.

MATTHEW EVANS / KNIGHTLIFE

Left to right: Khamisch and Nidal Othman take part in the first prayer (Salat al-fajr) in their living room with the quiet humm of the Islamic channel on the television.

After breakfast I followed Nidal down the long hall to watch him prepare himself for god. Nidal explained what he was about to do as we walked together.

"You must present yourself to Allah appropriately. I will dress in white for that is the color of honesty and purity. I must take part in a physical cleansing process, a way to clean my spirit and wash away sin. You wash your hands, gargle water, wash your nose, face, forehead to chin, hand to elbow, neck, ear, toes to ankle all three times in that order, you do this so your soul is clean. This is a way to respect Allah," he said.

Intrigued I watch with deep respect and interest as he silently mumbles the prayers. Even though Allah is always there, during the thirty-day period he is more a part of your life. Every prayer during this period has a stronger reward, but every sin has a stronger consequence because the sky is open.

"The sky is open everyday and for everyone; but the last part of Ramadan is most sacred so everything that you ask for will be heard by God; he will help you to achieve your goals. If you show perseverance and effort then you will be helped," said Saffa. The last part of Ramadan is the most sacred because that is around the same time that God gave Muhammad the Koran.

Nidal met his mother for prayer. The Hijab is a modest dress that women wear that covers everything but your hands and face. His mother wore the Hijab, which symbolizes the fact that you are closer to god and you have eliminated the temptation to sin by living more strictly. The more you do for God the more he will do for you.

The Hijab is a promise, once you put it on there is no going back. By wearing the Hijab you are saying that I am not available. This removes the temptation for a man to sin by obtaining a sexual thought about the women wearing the dress. The Hijab covers all of their body. This will force a man to fall in love with your smarts, not your body. Men can now appreciate you and not look at you as a sex object. You wear it when you are in the presence of someone other than your family.

Meticulous designs danced around on top of the beautiful prayer mats that were lying in front of Nidal and his mother. From an outsiders point of view this event was one of the most beautiful and serene things I have every looked upon, a true honor.

The Second Pillar is "to pray five times a day." Islam is a very personal religion meaning that there is nothing in between you and God such as a priest figure or a Pope figure. Praying can be done anywhere just as long as you are facing Mecca.

Mecca is the holy city for all Muslims located in Saudi Arabia. You have the choice to pray in a Mosque, which is the equivalent to a church except the services are not conducted by anyone. You go there and are with God in whatever way you are most comfortable. Even though there are guidelines, it is still flexible in the sense that no one can tell you how to be with Allah. Islam is very straight forward, no hidden agenda. You get out what you put in.

Family and where you live affect your life as a Muslim. Living in America, the Islamic laws aren't as strict. Saffa's family is on the liberal side, which means the cultural differences of the Islamic way compared to the "American" way will not greatly influence their life in America. They have kept very true and connected to their religion but have left room to exist comfortably within the modern world.

The Fifth Pillar is "a pilgrimage to Mecca," the most holy of lands. After your pilgrimage you par-take in a re-birth, a new life as a Muslim closer to god. Saffa's mother will make that pilgrimage to Mecca this year.

Numbers for knowledge

The Islamic religion is the second largest Religion in the world and is a very young religion, starting in the 6th century.

There are 5,259,000 Muslims living in America.

There are 1.84 billion Muslims in the world.

Michigan has the 6th highest population of Muslims in the USA with 170,000.

For more information about Muslims and the Islamic faith vistit www.islamiccity.com