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Learning responsibility through cleaning up around the community

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Fifth-grader Elise Rattray helped clean the solar farm of weeds and unwanted tree sprouts.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Taking responsibility for the world around them was a lesson New Discoveries Montessori wanted to teach its students.

New Discoveries is testing its new social-emotional learning curriculum, CharacterStrong, after spending almost a year planning it. The curriculum teaches social skills, executive functioning skills and emotional regulation. The programs use character education as a frame for teaching all of these skills.

An \$8,900 grant from PrairieCare Fund in May was used to implement a research-based social-emotional learning curriculum.

Special education teacher Bess Bauman said the staff implemented the social-emotional learning curriculum based on research.

“The research showed that students who received intentional social-emotional lessons in school showed an 11% increase in not only their academic outcomes, but similar increases in measurements of student conduct, discipline, prosocial behavior and emotional health,” Bauman said.

The curriculum started Aug. 21 with “kindness” being the first character trait discussed with “respect” following it in September. October is all about “responsibility” – taking action and understanding the impact of choices.

“Our curriculum talks about being responsible not just in your school or your home, but also in your community,” said special education teacher Jennie Asher. “And so we thought, wouldn’t it be cool if we did a whole schoolwide thing? And so I called up Sarah Witte at the city parks office and asked her if they would have anything that we could do.”

With the city assisting, the plan was for the students to go out Oct. 16 and help clean up around the community.

Each unit of students received an age-appropriate task. Preschool and kindergarten students remained at the school picking up sticks and pulling weeds. First-, second- and third-graders helped clean up the Luce Line Trail and surrounding parks. The students in fourth grade and older were tasked with marking storm drains, pulling weeds around the solar panel farm at 1400 Adams St. SE and mulching parks and flower beds.

Bauman said the students learned to take action by picking up trash and sticks. The purpose was to teach students that they have a responsibility to keep our community clean.

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