

Buddy System

At Lopez Island High School, each student gets to choose a topic to research and present on as her senior project. In the past, projects have ranged from creating a college-student friendly cookbook, to trying out the 100-mile diet, to redesigning his house in a more eco-friendly fashion. For my senior project, I chose to create a kindergarten through twelfth grade buddy system in which every student is matched with a different-aged buddy.

This project was born from my desire to improve Lopez School for the students after me. Last year, I had the opportunity to volunteer in the elementary school. I walked from my high school classes full of stress and hormones to a place where I could be goofy and accepted. The kids hugged me when I saw them in the library, and though I wasn't funny, they laughed at my jokes. I knew it wasn't possible for everyone to take her own time to spend surrounded by youngsters; in this, I found another aspect of my project: I would create a time during school hours when all the students could come together and get to know each other. I wanted my peers to experience the warmth and acceptance I felt with the younger kids, and I wanted the younger kids to feel special with the undivided attention of the "big kids."

I quickly learned that this program is a unique opportunity for my school. Due to our extremely small size (206 K-12 students), our school culture is deeply rooted in our relationships. My buddy project has helped to build and enhance this environment. The support of the staff, community and students has enabled its success.

To date, we have had two wonderful buddy events and are planning a field day at the end of May. At each, students have come together to participate in games, getting-to-know-you activities, an elementary open house and lunch and recess.

The buddy system has been a positive experience for all those involved. As K-12 Principal Lisa Shelby said, "The feedback, both solicited and unsolicited, has been extremely positive from students, parents, board members, community members, and staff." Senior Sarah Stanley explained that "The best part of being with my buddy was the feeling of being responsible for him, laughing with him and making him comfortable. I also love the feeling of being a role model and when his hands were so small he could only latch on to one of my fingers." Many students echoed this articulate statement: "The best thing about the buddy system was bonding with younger students, and seeing them be comfortable with older students."

Though designed as a one-year project, it will continue strongly next year. I am proud to leave a legacy as fun as this one, and hope that students can continue to grow and interact as positively as I have seen this year.