

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’ ”



“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

In Quakertown, a day fit for King

On Monday, Jan. 15, in each of its schools and classrooms, 5,400 QCSD students learned of the great civil rights leader.

By Gary Weckselblatt

The Quakertown Community School District honored Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, with students at every grade level learning about the heroic civil rights leader, whose profound words and selfless deeds place him among the greatest of all Americans.

In one class after another King's passion for racial justice and equality was sparked by teachers engaging students in the legacy of the man who preached for a colorblind society.

“It was a tremendous day,” Superintendent Bill Harner said of Monday's curriculum developed specifically to honor Dr. King. “I don't believe there's ever been a day when there was a K-12 focus like this on just one individual. Every student in school today learned something about Martin Luther King

Tom Brader's U.S. History class viewed a video of King's “I Have a Dream,” and read parts of his “Letter from Birmingham jail.”



Juan Soto's Spanish Honors class discussed MLK's “I Have a Dream” speech. Soto asked students what their dreams are, both for the school and the nation.

Jr., a truly great American. I am extremely proud of how we honored Dr. King.”

Perhaps there was nothing more stirring than watching King's “I Have a Dream” speech in Tom Brader's U.S. History Class.

The last five minutes of the 1963 speech, before 250,000 civil rights supporters in Washington, D.C., “came from his soul, and became the Constitution of the civil rights movement go-

ing forward,” Brader said.

Both Brader and Andrew Boquist, the U.S. Government teacher, had students break into smaller groups to read and discuss King's “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” in which King responded to the criticism of

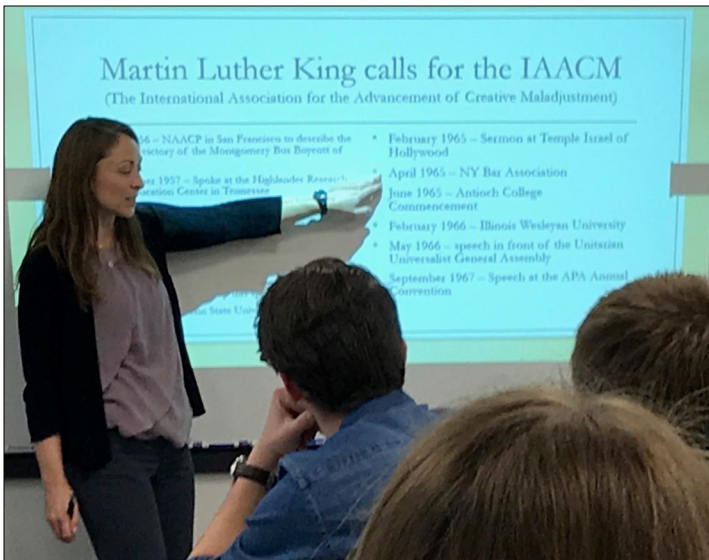
white Alabama clergy, who wanted the battle fought in the courts, and not on the streets.

“The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of water at a lunch counter,” King wrote in the margins of the newspaper, a note that Boquist found fascinating.

He had his students discuss the difference between just and unjust laws and how a law may be perfectly fine as long as it is applied fairly.

It wasn't only social studies classes where King was part of the curriculum. Amy Eisenmann's AP Psychology classes used Monday to learn about

Continued on next page



Advanced Placement Psychology teacher Amy Eisenmann focused “creative maladjustment,” a term King used in several speeches.

From previous page

“creative maladjustment,” a term King used in his speeches. Several times he described himself as being “psychologically maladjusted” and called for an International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment.

She had students read excerpts from his speeches and then played videos of King and his melodious tones. “What a dynamic speaker he was,” Eisenmann said.

She also asked students how they could apply his concept of creative maladjustment in today’s society, and spoke of the need to have the “confidence and courage to stand up for what you believe in.”

The reverence for King was also heard at Strayer Middle School, where Principal Derek Peiffer used his morning announcement to talk of King’s legacy.

“He preached that we should stand up to injustice, but do so in a peaceful manner,” Peiffer said. “He spoke about looking at a person for who they are and not what they look like.”

Peiffer read excerpts from “I Have a Dream,” and said King talked about “coming together as humans to help each other and everyone having the same freedoms. With freedom comes responsibility. So ask yourself the following: Do I treat everyone the way I would want to be treated? And do I always do my best and do I help others be successful? And finally, do I do my best to make Strayer Middle School the best it can be?”

Kevin McLaughlin spoke to his seventh graders about King’s “message of equality for all” and of “community service and helping others. The students watched the cartoon “My Friend Martin,” about two boys transported to the time when King was growing up.

“It took them in with the cartoon,” McLaughlin said, “but then you get the history and the message.”

He also gave the students a homework assignment: “What can you do in you community to continue the message of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?”

School by school, class by class, King’s words of equality, tolerance and service were the torches passed to students by teachers, proud to share his message.

While all grade levels learned of MLK, there was a diverse curriculum depending on the age group. At Quakertown Elementary School, for example, kindergarten students looked at a picture book of King and read “What Does It Mean to be Kind?” They each also spelled out “I can be a friend,” and sang positive songs about “Martin.”

“With help from our Office of Teaching and Learning, our teachers prepared and planned learning activities for our students so that they were able to understand and recognize what Martin Luther King did for the Civil Rights Movement and his significance to American culture and history,” said Dr. Michael Zackon, QE’s principal. “Lessons conveyed the importance and values espoused by Dr. King of caring, togetherness, and freedom. His message of coming together could not be more valuable today.”

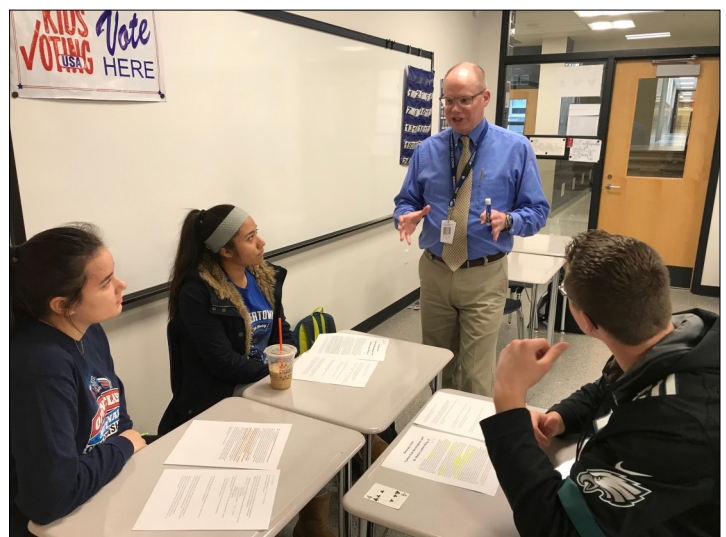
For Monday’s Spanish Honors lessons, Juan Soto had students translate phrases of King’s “I Have a Dream,” and then had them complete the sentence, “I have a dream that one day this high school ...” He asked them to then build on it with society and nation.

When one student called for respect, Soto said sometimes that can be difficult. “As a teacher, many times my kids disrespect me. Does that mean i have to disrespect them back? No. Do I have that right? Yes. But I have a choice. I’m going to treat that person respectfully. ... We can all be way better. We have the power. You have the power.”

When another student said the school should do more to combat bullying and harassment, Soto said, “Yes, we can stand for that person. So can all students. You have the power to tell someone to stop bullying a student if you see it.

“Yes, you have to tell the teacher. Yes you have to go to the office. But you have the power to stand next to the person and say ‘Stop. He or she does not deserve that.’ Once we do that, things will start taking shape.”

Gary Weckselblatt, director of communications, writes about the people and the programs that impact the Quakertown Community School District. He can be reached at 215-529-2028 or gweckselblatt@qcsd.org.



Students broke into small groups in Andrew Boquist’s Government class to discuss King’s legacy.



Celebrating King

Richland Elementary School third graders in Kelly Esposito's class put together a hallway wall in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday. At right, Quakertown Elementary School kindergartners sing songs with their teacher, Jane Germani, in a day with lesson plans dedicated to the civil rights hero.

