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Students Give Back to Local Elementary School

Summary: Students completed an “Outreach to Teach” project at St. Mary’s School in Morris.

(April 23, 2013)-On April 13, more than 30 volunteers from the University of Minnesota, Morris gathered at St. Mary’s School to complete an “Outreach to Teach” project. Students from the Education Minnesota Student Program (EMSP) chapter and the Studio Art Discipline renovated the school’s teacher’s lounge and painted a mural in a small tunnel connecting the school to Assumption Catholic Church.

EMSP co-president Corey Johnson ’14, Redwood Falls, initiated the group project. She was inspired by her experience at a 2012 National Education Association Student Program conference in which she helped renovate a Maryland elementary school. When Johnson came back to Morris, she approached EMSP about doing something similar “on a Morris-size scale.” The chapter selected St. Mary’s, a K-6 elementary school, as the site for the project, due in part to the school’s standing relationship with Morris’s education students.

“The teachers at St. Mary’s let us come in to observe their classrooms, which is not the easiest thing to do,” Johnson says. “We wanted to give back to the teachers as a way of saying ‘thank you’ for letting us get our education. We also really wanted to thank the kids.”

Principal Jennifer Shockley and EMSP Co-President Corey Johnson ’14, Redwood Falls

The students showed their appreciation by giving the walls and furniture in the teacher’s lounge fresh coats of paint. They also assembled new chairs for the staff. To thank the children, volunteers painted a bright mural in the school’s tunnel, which allows the young students to enter the church for their lunchtime. Narrow, low-ceilinged, and lit by a few overhanging light bulbs, the tunnel encourages a single-file procession of children, but is somewhat intimidating. During an open house, St. Mary’s students and families were able to add their own creative touch as part of the tunnel’s renovation.

Luci Riffel ’15, Virginia, and Kait Macheledt ’14, New Richmond, Wisconsin, are two student volunteers who answered Johnson’s call for artistic help. According to Macheledt, the project was “a fun way to give back to Morris.” Riffel agreed, adding, “it feels good to be putting something into the community, since it’s always been here for us.”

St. Mary’s Principal Jennifer Shockley is pleased with EMSP’s efforts to beautify her school. “The kids haven’t known what was happening, so it’s a surprise for them, but they got very excited seeing all the boxes in the hallways, and the staff are certainly excited for the changes.”

“We have a unique opportunity at Morris, because it’s a small town, to give back to the community, which is so important for our education,” says Johnson. “Education majors are in the community all the time, interacting with

students, parents, and teachers—we should give back.”

This “Outreach to Teach” project was funded through a CLASS Grant from the National Educator’s Association-Student Program.

EMSP Historian/Publicist Claire Goodrich ’14, Rochester, plays in the St. Mary's gym

Additional photos of the project are available [online](#).

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