



AZUSA

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Students in Azusa High ‘Best Buddies’ Program Participate in Campus Trick or Treat Candy Giveaway

In costumes ranging from Captain America to one of Disney’s Minions, 31 special needs students traversed the Azusa High School campus for an early Halloween trick-or-treat excursion on Oct. 29, accompanied by their AHS student peers. The activity was part of the school’s “Best Buddies” outreach program, which is designed to promote a more inclusive social environment for special needs students.

Best Buddies is an international organization dedicated to fostering opportunities for one-to-one friendships for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Azusa High established a campus chapter in 2010, and this is their third Halloween candy giveaway.

“The special needs students are known as ‘best buddies’ and they are paired with general education students, known as ‘peer buddies,’” said AHS Best Buddies President Elizabeth Cornejo. “We have lunch with them, go on field trips, and at the end of the school year we have a Best Buddies prom, with high schools from several school districts. It is a tremendously popular program at Azusa High.”

In order to provide more social opportunities for her students, Azusa High School Life Skills/Special Education teacher Sharon Hunt founded an unofficial campus Aztec Buddies Club in 2010. The AHS chapter, officially welcomed into the Best Buddies International in 2014, is nationally recognized for its leadership and fundraising abilities.

At the 2015 Best Buddies Southern California Friendship Walk held at Shoreline Village in Long Beach on May 2, former AHS faculty advisor Camille Caldwell was named 2015 Best Buddies Advisor of the Year.

“We have over 100 official ‘peer buddy’ students that work with our 31 ‘best buddy’ students, with well over 100 more unofficial ‘peer buddies’ who assist when they can,” said Hunt, who has resumed her position as AHS chapter faculty advisor. “We have student leaders, athletes, artists and many other wonderful people involved, who talk, play games, engage in fun activities and provide peer support.”

Azusa High principal Ramiro Rubalcaba, costumed as a flight captain, was among those collecting candy and encouraging the Best Buddies to collect treats from more than two dozen classrooms handing out candy during lunchtime. Afterward, all of the Best Buddies and their peers gathered for a group picture in the main quad.

“Azusa High’s Best Buddies program infuses the entire campus with pride and dignity,” AUSD Superintendent Dr. Linda Kaminski said. “It’s a social interaction model that engenders compassion and maturity, and serves the community.”

Best Buddies International, founded in 1989 by Anthony K. Shriver, is a nonprofit organization with almost 1,900 middle school, high school and college chapters worldwide. It adheres to a simple principle – to assist persons with IDD to secure rewarding jobs, live on their own and become inspirational leaders.

“It is such a joy to see students helping students,” Board of Education President Yolanda Rodriguez-Pena said. “Thank you to Ramiro Rubalcaba, Sharon Hunt, Elizabeth Cornejo and all of the volunteers who help to bring smiles and cheer to our students.”

PHOTO CAPTION: Students embarked on a trick-or-treating activity on Oct. 29 as part of the Azusa High School’s “Best Buddies” outreach program, which is designed to promote a more inclusive social environment for students.

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