

Headline: A Look Into LINKS

Subhead: How the LINKS program benefits the special education curriculum

Phoebe Miller (10) learned of the LINKS program through her counselor, who suggested it as a potential elective. She decided to join because she thought it would be a good learning experience and an opportunity to help out. For Miller, the program has proved to be much more than that.

The LINKS program partners general education students with students in the special education program and is scheduled during an open class period. During this period, the students work together on schoolwork and other activities in the curriculum.

The program is a recent addition to East Lansing High School, and has changed the way educators, like special education teacher Elizabeth Bastin, run their classroom. Bastin has students pair up with their LINK to work collaboratively on an activity instead of just sitting and listening to her.

“One of our biggest goals is we want to give the special education students as much of a regular school experience as possible, and having the links really gets on that.” Bastin said. “You guys (general ed students) sit in class and have discussions and work in groups, LINKS allows us to do that with them as well.”

For Miller, the program has been an excellent way to learn how to be a better friend to people with disabilities. According to Miller, it took some time to develop a relationship with her LINK, Zander. At first, she didn't know how to best communicate with him and was worried she would make him uncomfortable. However, the more time she spent with him, the more their relationship grew.

“You just have to get to know them as a person and their- certain challenges and their strengths and then you'll know how you can be a better friend to them,” Miller said.

Talking and listening to Zander through the program has made a lasting impact on Miller.

“He's really kind and good at paying attention to what others are thinking or feeling,” Miller said “He's taught me how to be a kinder person to others.”

Another participant in the program, Christine Keough (11), has also learned a lot from being a LINK. In class, she participates in many activities involving conversations and speaking. Because of this, Keough has been able to connect with her partner, Gavin and learn what he enjoys and how he prefers to communicate.

“I've learned a lot about patience and working with others,” Keough said. “It's helped me understand how everyone learns things differently.”

Marquis Muzambi-Dodd (12) is a senior in the special education program. He has worked with many LINKS during his time at ELHS. Marquis works with numerous links throughout the day in many of his classes. Muzambi-Dodd is a huge advocate for LINKS, he enjoys working with them on schoolwork and giving them high-elbows in the hallway.

“The LINKS are the best and they work hard,” Muzambi-Dodd said.

The program has enriched the learning experience for special education students and fostered greater independence for them while working on activities. According to Bastin, it's made the curriculum more fun since the students have a chance to work with friends and peers. It has also given general education students a chance to learn through helping others.

“I think some students join links because they see it as a free period and then they end up loving it,” Bastin said.