

Students cheer dogs, cats, Sox, and jeer Yanks - it's their right

BY CATHERINE BAUM STAFF WRITER

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Fifth-grade teacher Joseph Moynihan addresses students at William E. Norris School in Southampton during an assembly to mark the anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution Friday.

SOUTHAMPTON - Joseph Moynihan, a fifth-grade William E. Norris Elementary School teacher, asked students if they liked dogs. Their screams and claps echoed off the gymnasium walls. He then asked who liked cats. More cheers followed. Skunks are popular among elementary youngsters, too.

And when he asked about the Boston Red Sox, the gymnasium roared. A boy in blue stood up screaming, a girl wearing a red bow with silver stars in her hair waved her hands high, and nearly all the students pounded their feet on the bleachers. Then Moynihan mentioned the Yankees, his favorite team, drawings boos and many thumbs-down.

"Today we celebrate the diversity of the United States," Moynihan said to students, faculty and parents Friday at a school assembly that drew nearly 600 people to mark Constitution Day.

A federal law enacted in December 2004 designated Sept. 17, the day the United States Constitution was signed 220 years ago, to be "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day," stating that public schools hold an educational program on the U.S. Constitution to commemorate the day, David P. Driscoll, commissioner of education for the Massachusetts Department of Education, said on the DOE Web site.

All four Norris Elementary fifth-grade classes took part in the assembly because U.S. history is the main component of the fifth-grade social studies curriculum, teachers said. Three classes recited the Preamble for the Constitution and one class spoke into a microphone telling the audience their names, where their ancestors hailed from and boldly stating, while raising their torches made of felted-cardboard tubes, craft paper and confetti, "I am an American citizen."

"Mostly they get to scream and yell and celebrate themselves, which is a powerful moment for elementary students," Moynihan said.

Fifth-grade teachers Sunday Burke, Mia Chartrand and Kirsten Heath also helped organize the assembly. Burke said the program must be implemented within the same week as Constitution Day, which was last Monday.

"Sept. 17 is difficult because we're just starting to get to know all the students," Burke said. "They're just getting to know us."

Rebecca Rondeau, a fifth-grader in Moynihan's class, said she had fun this year and is looking forward to being a sixth-grader in the bleachers watching her cousin perform next year. "My favorite part was when we all joined in the circle to pop our torches because we had all our classmates there," Rondeau said. In class, students discussed Constitutional vocabulary, history and its relationship to citizens over a 10-day period, Burke said.

"It's a good thing that we got to do this in fifth grade because the Constitution is such a big part of their curriculum," Burke said. "It's a great way to start the year."

Darcie Gasperini watched her daughter, Allison Helems, between appointments at The Hair Station Salon, a Southampton salon she owns.

"Luckily I'm close by, so I can run in and see all of this," said Gasperini, whose salon is located on College Highway. "Allison's having a blast in Mr. Moynihan's class."

"Norris school is just a little slice of America but within our walls we're representing countries from across the world and it's wonderful to celebrate that," Moynihan said.

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