

WHAT'S THE Word?



QUARTER 1
NEWSLETTER

Flexible and **adaptable** have remained important words for us at My Special Word as we've continued to support our partner schools and programs through the first quarter of this year. Now, more than ever, the children we serve desperately need the positive power of words ... to reassure, calm, comfort and provide hope as they navigate the changing landscape of COVID. We've worked diligently to meet their needs through online and in-person support, which is an important part of a key priority we set for 2021 — **to enhance and expand the My Special Word experience.**

To bring this priority to life, we developed online programming for ages 5 through 13, and are refining our facilitator materials to ensure educators and counselors are even better equipped to bring our message to life. We're also developing story guides and exercises that make the important link between social/emotional learning and classroom learning objectives. Read on for just a small snapshot of the incredible work happening ... all because of your support. ♥



LAKESHORE ELEMENTARY GETS CREATIVE WITH MY SPECIAL WORD LAUNCH

We've been partnering with this special school in Honesdale, PA for almost five years so they have a strong, established MSW program and their students and staff wear their words proudly on t-shirts, and incorporate them into school discussion to connect and learn about one another. Normally they kick off the program at the start of the school year with a year-long challenge and a monthly celebration. With COVID challenges, they are navigating the waters of offering both in-person and virtual learning and got creative about their approach. **The team kicked off in March via a hybrid approach of Zoom and in-person with a focus on kindness and gratitude.** Founder Dwight Smith joined the Zoom sessions and had a blast interacting with the kids and witnessing their resiliency first hand.



“We’ve all learned a lot about ourselves with the My Special Word program. The exercises allow us to get to know students far deeper, builds rapport, and enables us to better help and support them. This type of social and emotional learning creates a safer, calmer school environment. Kids are going through rough things at home and teaching them the power of words gives them a way to verbalize their feelings, and provides light bulb moments for teachers and staff to have powerful conversations that make them feel safe, supported and cared for.”

—Sandra Rickard, Principal



Use Words to Build Up: OSU Alumni Magazine

My Special Word Founder Dwight Smith was recently interviewed by The Ohio State University Alumni Magazine. Read about why our work is so important now, more than ever — and how he believes we can all change the world through the power of words.

[CLICK HERE TO READ](#)

“With so many negative words being thrown around today, we need to flip the script. We need to acknowledge the power of what we’re saying, to think before we speak, to use our words to bring positive momentum.”

—Dwight Smith, Founder, My Special Word



FAIRWOOD ELEMENTARY'S FABULOUS FIFTH GRADERS

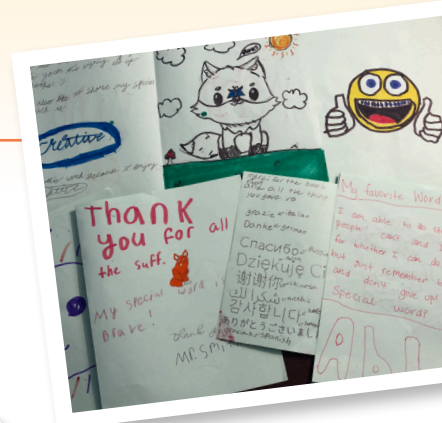


My Special Word was thrilled to support Ms. Jessica Ambach's 80 fabulous fifth grade students at Fairwood Elementary in Hamilton, Ohio. Ms. Ambach utilized the My Special Word curriculum to implement a social and emotional learning opportunity into the language arts curriculum to develop reading and writing skills. We initially sent a few chapter books and prizes for the class to support the implementation. The children responded so well and had such energy and excitement for sharing their special words that we sent each child their own autographed copy of the book, along with a My Special Word bag and toys.

Ms. Ambach used the books as a language arts curriculum supplement to support preparations for state testing, while also giving the children an opportunity to build self esteem and confidence as they selected a special word, shared with classmates and wrote about what their word means to them. Many children have limited access to books at home, so this was a great opportunity for them to take home something special and share it with their families.

"The kids had so much fun coming up with their special words and I loved learning more about them through this activity. Many of these students don't hear positive words about themselves at home, so it's important they hear positive words at school and learn the power of their words. They had classmates telling them they are smart, brave, and kind as they were all working to select their words. It was a breath of fresh air to think about ourselves positively and share that with one another. It was so encouraging to see the pure joy and excitement on their faces."

—Ms. Jessica Ambach, Fifth Grade Teacher



This My Special Word gift was in celebration of the love and life of our amazing friend, Missy Weiler.



Special FRIEND TRIBUTE

We remember and celebrate our dear friend and supporter Missy Weiler, who passed away earlier this year. She was a pillar of the Eastmoor community of Columbus, and along with her husband, Bob, supported many educational equity initiatives focused on advancing underrepresented minority and economically disadvantaged populations. She was an ardent supporter of My Special Word and shared our commitment to supporting children through education and hands-on service, which she demonstrated as the longest-serving volunteer in the Columbus City school system. For more than four decades, she tutored children at Ohio Avenue Elementary. Her "special word" was Gratitude. We pay tribute to her extraordinary example of generosity and service, and are forever grateful for the impact she made.



Q&A

WITH OUR FRIENDS AT KIPP

KIPP has been a MSW partner for more than four years and is a non-profit network of 255 college-preparatory, public charter schools educating early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school students.

We recently checked in with **Maggie Callender, School Leader at KIPP Columbus Primary.**

Q: How have you implemented MSW in such a challenging school year?

A: The first week back after winter break we incorporated MSW into our restart and it was a refreshing and positive way to welcome students back. We typically embed MSW into the language arts curriculum, but we expanded by utilizing the new online resources and activities. We also keep the conversation about our special words going by reading other books about characters and asking students to think critically about what the character's special word might be and write about it. We used the MSW packets with books, stickers and fidget spinners to make it even more fun for the kids.

Q: How does MSW support the curriculum?

A: Like a lot of schools, we wanted to add more social/emotional programming to meet the needs of our students, and utilizing MSW is a best practice because it blends the state learning curriculum and social/emotional learning. It's all part of living, breathing way to approach teaching. MSW is a perfect tool because it's building vocabulary with character traits, analyzing character actions, and students get to share who they are or who they want to be. It's academic, emotional and social all together.

CHECK OUT VIDEO OF A CLASSROOM EXERCISE [HERE.](#)

"Today, the kiddos learned something pretty amazing. They learned all about words and how they can be SO special. Not only can they be special, they can make you feel special! They discussed their special word and ways they can use it throughout the day!"

— Ms. Henderson, KIPP Kindergarten teacher

JOIN US **IN CHANGING A CHILD'S WORLD TODAY**
[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)

