



Enduring Understanding:
Students will realize that we better understand our world and become more engaged citizens when we appreciate the diversity of the people who create our unique community.

Dear ARMS Families,

ON VIEW: PHOTO-TEXT EXHIBIT by FAMILY DIVERSITY PROJECTS, Inc.

We are please to announce the opening of a special exhibit at ARMS in our lobby gallery, which will be on view through the second week of June. The show is a photo-text exhibit created by Family Diversity Projects, Inc., a non-profit organization that began producing these photo-text exhibits 30 years ago to break down stereotypes and combat prejudice by helping viewers learn about the experiences of people in their photographs. The vision statement of Family Diversity Projects, Inc. is parallel to our goals at ARMS: “We can move beyond our

stereotypes and prejudices when we meet and learn about the lives of real people.” Family Diversity Projects displays the printed text of interviews with people in the photos, alongside pictures. The fusion of the image and the text emphasizes the voices of the individuals in the photos, in an effort to help viewers come closer to understanding the experiences of those being portrayed in the exhibit. See their web site at <https://familydiv.org/>.



Figure 1. Family Diversity Projects, Inc. *In Our Family*.

EMPATHY AND SOLIDARITY. *In Our Family*.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE. As part of our yearlong curriculum in Advisory Groups that focuses on building empathy and solidarity, you may recall that we hosted a similar exhibit in our lobby gallery by Family Diversity Projects, Inc. from December 15, 2016 through February 15, 2017. We completed a number of Advisory Activities centered on the big idea of “There are many ways to be a family” with that exhibit titled, *In Our Family*. It depicted many different ways that families are shaped and experienced whether through adoption, birth,

foster care and other caring relationships. The exhibit portrayed families headed by two-parents, single parents, grandparents, as well as parents with a range of abilities/disabilities, parents of opposite sex, same sex, and family members demonstrating many other experiences of human difference. Throughout January and February each Advisory Group visited the exhibit three times and engaged in a range of curriculum activities to meet the learning objective: “Students will be able to respectfully discuss families and individual family members.” You can see some of the photos from that exhibit at this link: <https://familydiv.org/exhibits/in-our-family/>



Figure 2. Each Advisory Group studies the exhibit.

CURRICULUM NOW.

Pioneering Voices: Portraits of Transgender People.

BUILDING NEW KNOWLEDGE from MAY-JUNE. We are honored that ARMS is the first public school in the country to display this most recent exhibit called: ***Pioneering Voices: Portraits of Transgender People.*** By learning through photographs and interviews of the people in the

photos, our curriculum continues to build respect for the human dignity and worth of all individuals, while developing understanding about differences. Our ARMS staff members have developed a series of lessons for each Advisory Group to expand the big idea: “Students will understand that knowledge leads to empathy.” Lesson 1 helps students understand that knowledge dissipates fear and leads to empathy. New vocabulary is emerging about gender identity and this emerging terminology is explored in a context of respect. Lesson 2 and 3 guides students to see that the power of words leads to better understanding of our own and each other’s stories. The stories in the exhibit are studied with a stance of respectful learning. You can read much more about this photo-text exhibit at this link:

<https://familydiv.org/exhibits/pioneering-voices/>

COMMON QUESTIONS

Is the school teaching about sex? Since the theme of the photo-text exhibit is *Portraits of Transgender People*, it is common to ask, whether we are teaching about sex. We are not teaching about sexual activity, or sexual practices. We are teaching about identity. Learning that gender identity is expressed in a range of ways helps uphold the dignity of worth of all individuals, and cultivates empathy in a democratic society that sustains human rights.

Is the school taking a stand about religious beliefs? The school is not teaching religious beliefs. On the contrary, we are teaching about

respect for human difference, which is a common value across many faith communities. For example, at ARMS we teach a unit on world religions in 7th grade social studies. In that unit we do not teach students to practice specific religions, rather we teach about the role of religion in society, history and culture. By teaching our Advisory curriculum with this photo exhibit: *Portraits of Transgender People*, we are deepening our learning to better understand our world and become more engaged citizens through appreciation of the diversity of the people who create our unique community.



Figure 3. Family Diversity Projects. Pioneering Voices.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:

ARMS is committed to meeting the goals of *Curriculum and Instruction in Social and Emotional Learning* guidelines by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The following is stated on the Massachusetts DESE web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL/>

“Developing students' social emotional competencies can provide an opportunity to develop a sense of positive self-worth in connection to a student's race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation. Educators are encouraged to develop examples and illustrations of these competencies that are congruent with the social and cultural experiences of their students. In addition to contributing to academic success, SEL programs can also support the development of students' sense of autonomy, agency, and social justice.” – *Massachusetts DESE*

Five Core Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning in Massachusetts:

- Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social

- and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, and cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
 - Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the wellbeing of self and others.

MORE ABOUT FAMILY DIVERSITY, INC. Family Diversity Projects, Inc., has produced a wide range of photo-text projects on many themes such as:

- **In Our Family:** Portraits of All Kinds of Families
- **Love Makes a Family:** Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and their Families
- **We Have Faith:** LGBT Clergy and People of Faith Speak Out

- **Road to Freedom:** Portraits of People with Disabilities
- **Of Many Colors:** Portraits of Multiracial Families
- **Pioneering Voices:** Portraits of Transgender People
- **Nothing to Hide:** Mental Illness in the Family

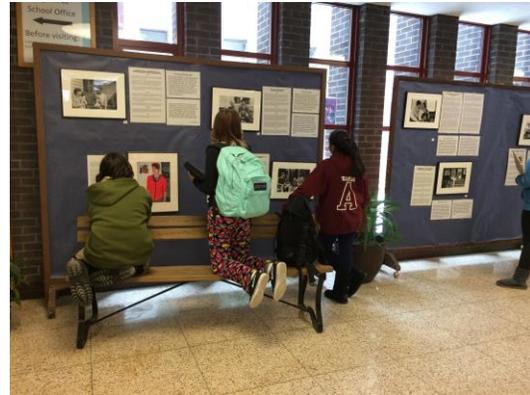


Figure 4. ARMS Advisory Groups in Lobby Gallery.



Figure 5. Family Diversity Projects. In Our Family.

Contact ARMS. We welcome your questions and concerns. We hope you will visit the exhibit. Please contact Principal Patty Bode at 413-362-1800 or bodep@arps.org if you have any questions. In accordance with School Committee policy on the rights of parents and guardians of our students in relation to curriculum that primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issues: Parents/guardians may exempt their child from any portion of the curriculum that primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issued, without penalty to the student, by sending a letter to the school principal requesting an exemption.