

Giving Back While Growing Up

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The Progressive School of Long Island encourages volunteerism, healthy living and the celebration of diversity.

Located in the heart of Merrick is the Progressive School of Long Island (PSOLI); an institution whose core mission is to promote Neo-Humanist Education. (NHE) “NHE emphasizes creative and critical thinking, curiosity, social and moral responsibility, and respect for all living things,” says Eric Jacobson, who founded PSOLI in 1985 and currently serves as the Education Principal. “Emphasis is placed on experiential learning, service to society and our environment, and celebrating diversity.

PSOLI may be a small school—it houses less than 200 students, ranging from grades Kindergarten to Eighth—but its students have huge hearts of gold. For instance, the middle schoolers have a required course called Student Volunteering. “In 2006, a group of students took on the idea of solar power for our new building. This idea came out of their caring for the environment, and their own personal interests. Through research and family involvement, they were able to secure two major donations: free installation, and free architectural services,” says Jacobson. “Through holiday parties, car washes, movie nights, and donations, they were able to secure about 50% of the remaining funds required. The School put up the rest.

According to Jacobson, PSOLI’s students and alumni are devoted to community service. Recently, one grade, conducted a math based initiative at their local food pantry; a math-based initiative designed to teach practice math. “However, it also served the Food Bank as well and created a math lesson that was memorable to students,” says Jacobson. Jacobson’s philosophy on learning is unique and important. He stresses a memorable and engaging education not just memorizing and tests.

Two years ago, students raised thousands of dollars in cash and kind for Haiti earthquake victims, and even had a graduate in Haiti distributing the donations. “Much of this work just happens routinely here,” explains Jacobson.

Unlike most schools, all students from K-8 practice collective morning exercises of yoga and meditation in an assembly format. “To tame and manage the mind and its propensities is considered a cornerstone of true education at PSOLI,” says Jacobson. “We are also

tackling the topic of healthy eating in small steps. The benefits of vegetarian and organic foods are part of Health courses for older students.” The school even owns and operates its own snack machines, which are stocked with only natural or organic foods.

PSOLI students find academic and social support from their peers and educators, but also from the community at large. “We have great support from Long Islanders who want to use their abundance to make a difference for someone else,” says Jacobson. “Many New Yorkers recognize the need for a more global education; one that teaches how to evaluate various points of view with true open mindedness and honors our diverse backgrounds.”

Progressive School of Long Island is located at 1425 Merrick Avenue in Merrick. For more info, call 516-868-6835 or visit ProgressiveLI.org.