Liberty’s Learning Showcase brings students, parents together

LIBERTY — Kyla Wheatcroft deliberately turns the page of her data notebook — eagerly telling you every detail on it.

Kyla is in the third grade at Liberty Elementary School where twice a year, parents, grandparents and anyone with the desire and interest can come and share a student’s progress.

The record of this progress is kept in a large white ring binder, a data notebook, and every student has one, where classwork, benchmarks tests, writing samples, awards, spelling words, projects and a list of goals are saved for sharing. Part of the lesson is the sharing. Students tell interested adults all about their work, what they need, what needs work and what they learned. These student-led conferences create a sense of ownership, not only of the notebook but the work that is in it.

The idea of the Learner’s Showcase began at Hopewell Elementary with their “Way to Grow” program and was later adopted by Principal Kelli Harrell at Liberty Elementary. The event, reports Harrell, is an “alternative to the traditional honor roll assembly” where the school is “trying to communicate more clearly with parents the growth students are making in school. It is about communication and parent involvement.”

There is a showcase at mid-term and one at the end of the school year. Harrell is quick to say she runs a school with “great kids” but there have been “academic challenges.” She coaches students to make “compassion, integrity and innovation” their core ideals, values to carry them from 5th grade on to Northeastern Randolph Middle School and on to Providence Grove High School.

After that, the notebooks, she feels, give parents a sense of their student’s progress and the starting point for a conversation about education and goals.

All the notebooks include a question sheet for the parents. Parents are also invited to speak with the teacher given all the conferences take place in the student’s classroom. The conferences also offer the opportunity for parents to speak to each other, become more involved the school and create a supportive classroom community.

Gwen Trudler, teaching assistant in Ms. Allderman’s kindergarten classroom, enjoys the exchange the showcase brings to her classroom. “This is where it all begins,” she tells parents. “We try to give them the love of school and love of learning, a solid foundation, and this classroom is the foundation.”