

Andrews Hosts Holiday Concert for BHAS Students

Program for approximately 400 grades 1, 2 and 4 Benton Harbor Area Schools students

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Andrews students presented a series of skits to students from the Benton Harbor Area Schools. (Photo by Darren Heslop, University Communication staff photographer)

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On Friday, Nov. 30, 2018, Andrews University's Human Empowerment Life Project (H.E.L.P.), hosted a holiday concert at the Howard Performing Arts Center for approximately 400 grades 1, 2 and 4 Benton Harbor Area Schools (BHAS) students.

Carlisle Sutton, director of Community Engagement Integration & Service, says, "In response to a request from a BHAS administrator, H.E.L.P. developed a holiday concert to showcase expert use of different musical instruments and varied vocal styles. These items were incorporated into an engaging drama that communicated positive values. This is the third annual event."

H.E.L.P. is an initiative through which Andrews University partners with students, teachers and administration of the BHAS to provide resources that seek to improve the learning outcomes and provide positive experiences for students in grades 1, 2, 4 and 5.

This semester H.E.L.P. has been teaching “respect” in the weekly values-based program. The skit in the holiday concert was designed to emphasize the importance of making right choices daily and the harmful effects of bullying and using negative words. The drama showed the students that when respect is combined with compassion, kindness and courage, individuals can make positive changes in the lives of those around them.

The concert also provided opportunities for the students to listen to a number of musical selections by Andrews students, including Deliverance Mass Choir, guest soloist Xiomara Urbina, and actor Andre Henry.

Throughout the program, attending students paid close attention to the drama, applauding after each item and cheering each musical selection. At the end of the program, all were invited to participate in a Christmas sing-a-long.

The elementary school teachers in attendance were also appreciative of the program. “My class really enjoyed the Christmas performance at Andrews University,” says Lisa Bennett, teacher at Benton Harbor Area Schools. “The choir was outstanding. Also, the skit was right on time. What a great experience for the students to see other students excelling and using their talents in a positive way.”

“My class enjoyed the music and asked lots of questions about the musical instruments,” says Jackie Wheeler, another BHAS teacher. “One student surprised me when I asked if anyone could describe the best part of the program. This student described the skit about ‘bullying’ in great detail. He was able to tell the meaning of the skit... Our students enjoyed interacting with Andrews students and were helped in their classwork as well.”

Eric Sweeting, Andrews student, says, “I loved it just as much as last year’s. I love to see the kids excited and engaged.”

Andrews student Autumn Meis agrees. “I thought the concert was a lot of fun and a good experience.”

The administration, teachers and parents of the Benton Harbor Area Schools worked hard to ensure students were able to attend the event.

Sutton says, “We long to see the boys and girls from Benton Harbor succeed. I hope this event exposed them to new areas they can pursue to fulfill their purpose. We hope the lessons taught in the play help them make better choices. I am also trusting that the more we see and meet these kids, our care for them will deepen. We would see as Christ sees and be willing to do whatever it takes to help them understand their immense value and learn to thrive— for we are all made in the image of God.”

The program opened with the national anthem, then a welcome from Andrea Luxton, Andrews University president, and an introduction from Christon Arthur, Andrews University provost. Special support was given from many on the Andrews campus: the staff of the Howard Performing Arts Center; ITS staff; David Faehner, vice president for University Advancement; staff from the James White Library who provided toys for the students; and staff from the School of Distance Education & International Partnerships who sponsored beverages for attendees.