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Young helpers learn life skills Rising Stars motivates students at Burleson

By Ruth Campbell – rcampbell@oaoa.com

Burleson Elementary School's Rising Stars venture was just implemented this year, but it has already garnered the Outstanding Junior Volunteer Program award.

The group received the recognition at the recent Volunteers & Partners Celebration.

Principal Tristan Specter said Rising Stars is for fourth and fifth-graders and there are about 60 members. About 29 played on the playground on the campus May 9.

They help with almost anything around campus and he provides treats and activities for them, such as movies. The students help the counselors, librarians, read to younger students and deliver Food 2 Kids.

"If the office needs help moving anything or doing anything, they're the ones they're supposed to call for help," Specter said.

The Rising Stars also helped kindergarten students log onto iStation, a web-based learning program that helps campuses determine how their students are doing academically.

Specter said he was glad that the students and Volunteer Chair Pat Lopez won the VIPS award.

"I'm happy for the kids and happy for Pat because, honestly, it's the kids' good behavior. It's the kids that are willing to help. ... I'm proud of them and I'm proud of the hard work of all the VIPS," Specter said.

Fourth-graders Audree Porras, 9, and Joaquin Carrasco, 10, have enjoyed being part of Rising Stars.

Porras said she wanted to join because it seemed like fun.

"I like helping people — a lot," Carrasco said.

Both want to be part of the group again next year and they liked being recognized at the celebration lunch.

Porras liked being in the newspaper and enjoyed the food.

"Rosa's Café. That was really, really good," she said.

Specter said part of the reason Rising Stars is just fourth and fifth-graders is that he wants to keep them coming to school.

"I want to give them something to keep them motivated as they get older because when you come



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Students from Burleson Rising Stars pose with Permian High School National Art Society student Tory Shelton, Burleson Principal Tristan Specter and ECISD Board Vice President Doyle Woodall (front). In the back are Superintendent Tom Crowe and Burleson Volunteer Chair Pat Lopez.

to school you're so excited and so happy, but as they get older I want to keep them excited and happy about coming to school," he said.

The students have to go through a process to become part of Rising Stars and get a badge. If they keep their badge over the summer and bring it back, they can be fast-tracked.

"... Part of the program is responsibility. If they lose their badge, then (they) start from ground zero with a brand-new sheet of paper. ... You've got to be responsible for what you have," Specter said.

Specter said the program started in 2005 when he was assistant principal at Burleson with Martha Mitchell as principal. Specter brought it back this year.

Burleson has 430 to 440 students in grades kindergarten through fifth.

He said they discussed implementing it last year, but didn't have enough time.

"... I think it's been a success. You see that these are kids that make good grades. These are kids that don't get referrals. It's probably about half of my fourth and fifth graders. That's a big chunk of kids that are top-notch, great kids," Specter said.

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