

Several years ago Lafayette invented the word “informance” to describe events when we invite parents to come to the school and see what we have been learning. It seemed so much more appropriate than performance. On Friday our first grade students will be having the first informance of the school year when they present their annual Veteran’s Day Patriotic Celebration. It is one of my favorite informances of the school year.

A little background to this very moving event:

Several years ago new social studies standards were developed for DCPS. In the first grade one of the standards says *students will demonstrate understanding of U.S. symbols, icons and traditions, including national songs, holidays, and the Pledge of Allegiance*. So our first grade teachers got to work and developed instructional units for this standard. Icons to learn about like the Liberty Bell and the bald eagle were identified. They worked with the music teacher on a list of American classics like *You’re a Grand Old Flag* and *This Land is Your Land*. Ms. McLaughlin created some new art units. For the culminating activity the first grade patriotic celebration was developed and this year’s edition will be presented on Friday morning.

The Patriotic Celebration and all the learning the students do have been put to use at other times during the school year. When the bust of the Marquis de Lafayette was repaired thanks to the Byrne-Kvalsvik family, the French Ambassador was invited to the school to take part in the event. We needed a group of students to sing *The Star Spangled Banner* that morning. Who else but our first grade students? You see, no one has told them that our national anthem is a real challenge to sing. It’s just another song to them. So that morning, loud and clear, their voices rang out. And to add even more to the event they also learned *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem. The French Ambassador was amazed. Apparently their national anthem is also considered extremely difficult to sing and is not introduced until much later in school.

We also took the Patriotic Celebration on the road one year. More than 100 children got onto big yellow buses for the trip to Walter Reed Medical Center where they were the entertainment for the one of the monthly Wounded Warrior ceremonies. I still wonder what the audience thought when our little students marched on to the risers in the large dining hall, decked out in red, white and blue. I know the students that day were so proud to be singing to our soldiers. It will be one of my most treasured Lafayette memories.

So this week the first grade will be in the cafeteria rehearsing for the big day. They will be on the stage singing as individual classes and as an entire grade level. They will create tableaux and recite facts about the American flag. They will be singing *The Star Spangled Banner* with a new twist this year courtesy of Miss Irene. Each year there are a few changes to the program but the overall result is the same. Incredibly proud parents amazed at just how much a first grade student can learn in 9 weeks of school. Incredibly tired teachers who are also very proud of their students and relieved that the event is over. And not a dry eye in the house at the end of the show. Another example of how we do learning at Lafayette.