

When She Makes a Promise, There's Just No Kidding Around

Highland View ES principal puckers up as part of a deal with students

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When Sammy Garland thinks of her ideal playground, it's got a climbing wall, a big slide and some swings — more than the set of monkey bars she and her classmates currently have to play on.

In the fall, the 8-year-old Highland View Elementary School student will get her wish: one that's been a long time coming.

Students at the Silver Spring school recently raised enough money to buy a piece of new play equipment at the school, which has only had one set of monkey bars since a piece of wooden play equipment was condemned by Montgomery County Public Schools three years ago, said Principal Susan Barranger. The equipment was old and children were getting splinters.

But Highland View couldn't get a replacement piece of equipment because MCPS has a limited yearly budget to support playgrounds.

"Pieces are ridiculously expensive," Barranger said, adding they cost between \$11,000 and \$15,000.



Principal Susan Barranger gives "Pig" one more kiss while parent George Slenkovich holds on.



When Highland View Elementary School Principal Susan Barranger told her students that she'd kiss a pig is if they read 10,000 pages during a fund-raiser read-a-thon, she meant it. So when the pig they were going to use got sick, Barranger (left) agreed Thursday to kiss a goat while a Highland View parent held the animal.

So the school decided to raise money for the equipment itself and created the goal of raising \$11,000, which seemed like a big number to shoot for, Barranger said.

Over the past two and a half years, the school raised \$7,000. "We had a special playground fund and we kept trying to funnel money into it," she said.

Then earlier this school year, students held a penny drive and raised \$4,000, which Best Buy matched. But when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, students voted to donate that money to hurricane victims even though they had raised enough to buy play equipment.



“Pig” the goat spends a bit of quality with the students at Highland View Elementary School.

total, they read 38,000 pages and on Thursday, Barranger made good on her promise — almost.

After a few failed attempts to secure a pig — one was eaten by its owners and another was stressed out, according to PETA — parents were able to borrow a pig from Homestead Farms. But on his way to the school, he got sick and had to be returned. A goat was sent in his place, but he wore plastic pig ears as a compromise.

But the kids didn’t mind. They were excited that their principal was going to kiss a farm animal — any farm animal — and that come fall, they’d have something new to play on during recess.

“I was very, very, very, one thousand times very excited,” said Margaret Brown, 8. You don’t get to see a goat at school every day, she said.

“She put lipstick on before she kissed him,” Garland added.

Garland said she did her part in the read-a-thon by reading the fifth “Harry Potter” book and a lot of “Droon” books, a fantasy series.

Eight-year-old Jason Peck said he read 198 pages, and also read a “Harry Potter” book, which he liked because characters got to do spells.

Kristen Gaskins, 8, said she read about 300 pages and it wasn’t hard because she likes to read. She likes to play, too, and is looking forward to the fall.

“[The new equipment is] going to have a big slide with a blue tube and you’ll get to go through it,” she said.

So the PTA got some support from Silver Spring businesses and parents organized a read-a-thon. Children read books and got sponsors who agreed to donate money for the number of books or pages they read. The whole school participated in the read-a-thon regardless of whether they got adults to sponsor them, Barranger said.

“I decided to challenge them,” she said. “I had no idea what that challenge would be. So I said, ‘If you all read 10,000 pages, I’ll ... I’ll kiss a pig!’”

The idea of seeing their principal getting friendly with a pig ignited students’ enthusiasm and put them way over their goal, both in raising money and in reading. In



Andy and George bring “Pig” back home to Homestead Farm.