

Chicago Tribune

July 31, 2009



Eden Mandell (left), 8, Allyson Gordon, 8, Ryan Mack, 8, and Shelby Auerbach, 8, read copies of "Dear President Obama: Letters of Hope from Children Across America" for which they contributed letters or drawings. ANDREW A. NELLES/PHOTO FOR THE TRIBUNE

Next generation weighs in

Students' letters to Obama published

By Ruth Fuller
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Ryan Mack, 8, of Highland Park was often known as the peacemaker in his 2nd-grade class, so it didn't come as a surprise to his teacher that his letter to President Barack Obama would discuss ending war, or that it would be among those selected for a new book.

Ryan's letter was one of eight letters and pictures selected from his class at Braeside Elementary School for inclusion in, "Dear President Obama: Letters of Hope from Children Across America."

The book is a collection of 179 letters and drawings to Obama from children in 29 states.

After being asked to participate, teacher Larry Hiler told his students to offer their advice to the president and let him know what they would like him to think about when he took office.

"I hope when you are president we won't have wars, guns, robbers and fighting," Ryan wrote in his letter. "We will have world peace."

"Ryan helped out in class a lot and always got upset when kids didn't get along," Hiler said.

Hiler said that this presidential election gave children a greater desire to learn about presidential history than he has seen in 36 years as a teacher.

"When it came down to Hillary [Clinton] or Obama and they knew that either would make history they got so excited," he said. "My students started developing an interest in reading biographies about all of the presidents, and they began telling me facts that I didn't know."

A picture selected for the book drawn by Shelby Auerbach, 8, shows Obama giving a speech with his wife, Michelle, and daughters, Sasha and Malia, looking on. The first lady is holding a puppy. Shelby said that if she had a chance to talk to Obama's daughters she knows just what she would say: "I think your dad is really amazing and fun."

Eric Rhum, 9, drew a picture of

Obama and himself with the American flag and a banner that reads, "No Smoking."

"It's better if you don't smoke because smoking isn't good for your health," he said.

Eden Mandell, 8, said she drew a picture of herself with Barack Obama in front of the White House because she thinks it would be a great place to visit.

"I want to look at all of the cool places they have there," she said. "I would want to ask him what made him want to be president."

Allyson Gordon, 8, said that her drawing of the White House, surrounded by water and flowers, represents what Obama would experience in the White House. "It represents [the president] having a good time and that it will be beautiful," she said.

Allyson's parents, Rich and Julie, said they were shocked and elated when they heard that their daughter's drawing was selected for the book.

"We are very proud that she was part of such an important book at such an important point in history," Julie Gordon said.