

Students find "Best Buddies" at St. Max

By **Chris McGowan**

St. Max is a relatively new high school to Aurora, opening its doors in 2009 and has a current enrolment of approximately 865 students.

Currently at the school, there are fifteen special needs students and the Best Buddies club pairs two or three of the regular learners with a student that has special needs. This interaction between the regular learners and the special needs students allows the special needs students to interact and do activities they might enjoy as it is difficult for them to acquire friendship sometimes. As well, the regular learners that are club members are given the opportunity to learn more about helping and befriending special needs students, and reaching out to be a friend where a friend is needed. And so friendships are made

Best Buddies Canada has encouraged the Best Buddies clubs and programs in schools at the elementary level, high school and University and there are also programs available for special needs adults. Over the last few years, teachers have been given better tools and strategies to help special needs students which have encouraged the interaction and help from the regular students. "We encourage the students to get together and do activities" said Val Hallman, Special Education Teacher at St. Max.

The Best Buddies club arranges for the Buddies to meet on a regular basis in the school, such as hanging out together, talking and listening to music. Once a month they are involved in events outside of the school, such as bowling, or going to a movie. "There are five teachers involved with the program, but the students do most of the planning" said Hallman. The St. Max teachers that provide leadership and support to the students are; Ms. Deighan, Ms. Pizzardi, Ms. Hallman, Ms. Quintieri and Ms. Charitsis.

The school has gone beyond the regular meetings and declared one full week as Best Buddies week which took place at the end of March. During the week the entire school enjoyed a variety of events which included Morning Prayer with Peers, a home room quiz, and the favourite event of all is "Hoop it Up" which is a basketball game that involves the special needs students as well as others. "Everyone has fun" said Hallman.

The club will continue to meet regularly becoming better friends and in April they are planning a Glow in the Dark Mini Putt outing.

There is no stopping the success of this club at St. Max.