

June 14, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jonathan Szish, School and Community Relations Coordinator (724-763-5268)

ASD RELATIONSHIP WITH NATIONAL CHARACTER EDUCATION FOUNDATION HITS HIGH POINT

Superintendent lobbies for character ed in Harrisburg, writes character education policy for district

FORD CITY – This spring, hundreds of students at West Shamokin and Ford City junior-senior high schools were wowed by basketball handling champ Charlie Aeschliman, a former Navy SEAL who dribbles and spins two basketballs at once while teaching about perseverance.

His high-energy assemblies are the result of the Armstrong School District's partnership with the National Character Education Foundation. The national foundation has a team of motivating speakers and performers who connect with youth about the noble values of character in a world that often puts up less-than-stellar role models.

For two years, Armstrong School District students have benefited from the character education foundation's programs. Because of this, Armstrong School District Superintendent William Kerr traveled to Harrisburg June 6 to endorse the work of the National Character Education Foundation before a committee of state representatives.

State Rep. Tom Stevenson, chairman of the House Ethics Committee, called this special meeting to update, educate and encourage House members to continue supporting the National Character Education Foundation program throughout Pennsylvania. The legislators got to see what students have been seeing: Basketball whiz Aeschliman dribbled basketballs in the Main Capitol Building while giving powerful lessons about integrity, respect and courage.

In 2004, the legislature gave a \$180,000 state grant to the National Character Education Foundation to help continue and expand its programs. Because of this, the foundation has been able to give more in-depth programs at nearly 200 western Pennsylvania schools.

Founder David Rettig used the Harrisburg opportunity to ask for a \$200,000 grant from this year's state budget. His goal is to move Pennsylvania toward a total, coordinated character education effort. The state now has a fragmented character education initiative, he said.

Rettig gave legislators shocking statistics about what teens are up against today. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among teenagers. Many kids' role models are rap artists who demean women and promote violence, or shock radio jockeys who desensitize youth to harmful influences. Children are also playing and watching violent, shoot-'em-up video games and movies.

Kerr, the only school superintendent asked to attend, told legislators about the foundation's programs from an Armstrong School District perspective. The foundation has done nearly 20 assemblies for the district.

"The foundation deserves the appreciation and support of every parent and teacher," Kerr said. "In today's world, teaching students the attributes of a strong character is the highest priority in youth development."

Rettig invited Kerr to Harrisburg because Armstrong School District has supported the work of the foundation during its formative years.

"ASD has inspired and empowered the NCEF – because we were so young – to roll this out and to make it more possible for everyone in the state to use it," Rettig said.

The district is also writing a citizenship and character education policy that intends to embed civic responsibility, honesty, sportsmanship and respect as part of the curriculum in school classrooms, on playing fields and in social situations.

###