



# Herald-Tribune

## A lesson on inclusiveness

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We hear speeches almost every day, but occasionally we are privileged to hear one like the speech given by Booker High School Principal **Rachel Shelley** at the sold-out Embracing Our Differences (EOD) luncheon at Michael's on East.

You could have heard a pin drop as Shelley shared pieces of her life story, including being born with skin darker in that of her mother and maternal grandmother, a woman who continually made fun of her, even calling her names. And when a childhood accident left a noticeable scar over her left eye, the name-calling continued and even worsened, as schoolmates took up the taunting. A teacher in third grade forever changed her life, Shelley said, “pouring knowledge into me, which I soaked up like a sponge. She embraced me,” Shelley said, “giving me hope, inner strength, self-worth and value.

“That teacher was the first of many who embraced Shelley, who eventually married her high school sweetheart, graduated from Bethune Cookman and went on to be named Florida's Principal of the Year. All of which is why she has worked so hard to create an inclusive environment at Booker. “We live it every day,” she said. “Bring us your kids,” she said, and no matter the

differences - racial, economic, religious, sexual orientation or physical limitations, “We will teach them. We will embrace them all,” she said. It was a moving, emotional speech that spoke to the mission of Embracing Our Differences: Through the transformative power of the arts, to educate and inspire to create a better world that embraces diversity, respects differences and actively rejects hatred and prejudice.

Guests were greeted by EOD Board Chair **Dennis McGillicuddy**, who noted that this marks the 15th anniversary for Embracing Our Differences and its annual exhibit of billboard-sized artwork with accompanying quotations created by students from around the world. The 2018 exhibit will be on display in April and May. Associate Executive Director **Sarah Wertheimer** recapped the program’s growth over the years, both at its exhibit and its year-long educational initiatives. Indeed, more than 212,000 viewed the exhibit last year, which were chosen from 10,761 submissions.