

STAND UP FOR JUSTICE AWARD NOMINEE APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

Describe the precipitating events that motivated you to initiate these lessons or activities

I began my career in teaching in Chicago Public Schools over 25 years ago. I chose the path of education after reading the text "Savage Inequalities" (Kozol 1991.) This book explored the public school system and generational poverty. I was appalled that so many children were born in a system that was determined to fail them.

My first class in the small neighborhood of Humbolt Park, on the West side of Chicago was in a large school pre-kindergarten-eighth grade. I taught kindergarten to thirty students in the morning and 30 students in the afternoon. These beautiful children were so excited to be at school. They loved every second of school. It was school where their bellies were fed, and they were safe and warm. Inside the walls of Cameron Elementary children did not fear the cold, nor gang violence nor worry about shelter, they were safe. Outside of those walls the streets were filled with liquor stores, adult entertainment and fast food. Just as they were in Kozol's book. I began to realize this generational poverty was in my own backyard. After four years at Cameron Elementary in Kindergarten and Head start, I knew I needed to do more. So, I began my master's degree in counseling. How could I effectively teach when children have so many of their basic needs unmet? I used this degree for the next twenty years in my educational career. This I year I was ready to take all my years of teaching the whole child to a whole school. This is my first year as a school counselor. I am so incredibly lucky to be a part of Big Cypress Elementary. I am now

able to bridge the gap many students have and create a safe environment for all students.

Being a school counselor has given me the amazing opportunity to celebrate positive behaviors and kindness. Plato stated, *“Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”* Our goal is to promote kindness, caring and compassion for all.

Growing up we moved from Detroit Michigan to Chicago. As I child I struggled being the new kid. We moved to an area that was predominantly Catholic. I was Jewish and was teased by several children on our block because of my religion. I remember feeling so alone. All the children on our block which to me seemed enormous went to private school. I went to a public school on the South Side of Chicago. I additionally felt isolated in school as I was the only child that was Caucasian and there too, I was teased.

Describe the lessons or activities; and if adapted from another source please reference

My experience as a pre-teen shaped a major part of me. I use this experience to combat bullying and isolation. This year I run the first ever new-student club. I work with second and third grade children, some of whom are new and others who want to support new kids. We started our club with the following video that shows the experience of a student starting at new school.



We talked about being new and what that feels like and how we can help. Students decided to create new student bags for all new students that come to BCE. Each bag contains a note for the new child, a t-shirt, water bottle, friendship bracelet and more! As new students come, these “friendship ambassadors” welcome the child and give them a tour of their new school. New students are encouraged to find children with the blue bracelets if they feel lonely and ambassadors are trained to find them. We also incorporate the CCPS Buddy Bench program. Ambassadors are trained to find children who are sitting on the bench and incorporate strategies we have learned at our club with children at the bench, whether they are new or not. BCE uses an adapted version of Ron Clarks’ House System. In our school we have four houses. Honesty, Kindness, Responsibility and Kindness. I created Positive Referrals around this system. Children earn a referral for being one of the traits mentioned above. Our theme this year is growing leaders. The goal of the children is each time they earn a positive referral is to fill our tree with leaves. As you can see in the picture below, we have a plethora of referrals. We have over 162 positive referrals so far, and discipline issues are down by 38%.



One of the ways we celebrate positive behaviors is through PBIS celebrations. Each quarter children work to promote positivity across campus. The first quarter we transformed the media center into an airport. Children who displayed positivity and kindness received a ticket to fly with us on BCE Airlines. Children went through security, received in-flight snacks and created airplanes. Second quarter we had the BCE winter games. Our entire field was filled with an obstacle course and giant bob-cat games. We are anxiously awaiting our third quarter sock-hop!



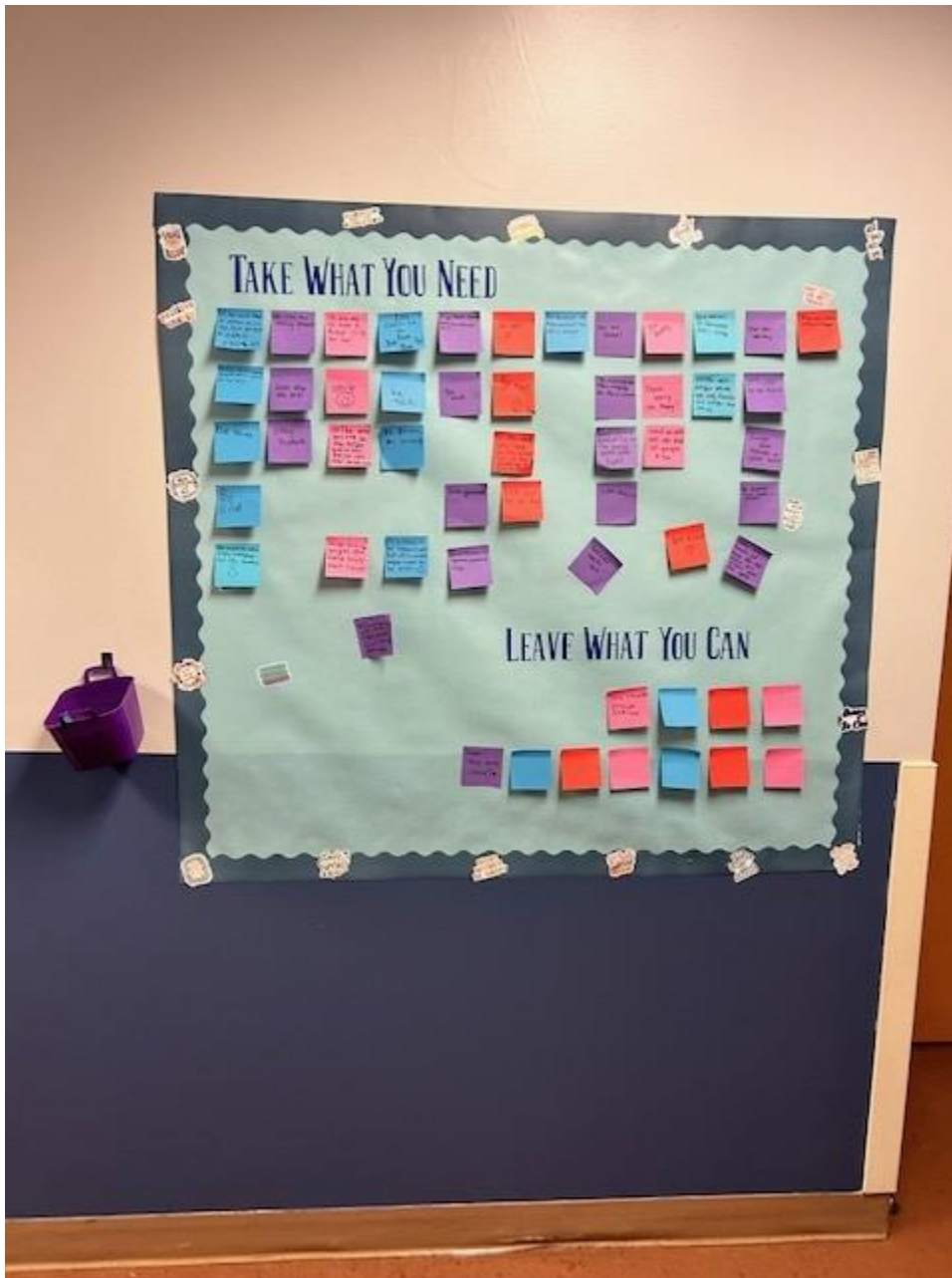




I believe it is important to be proactive rather than reactive when promoting positive behaviors. Rather than waiting for social injustice, bullying and or other cultural indifferences to occur, we promote kindness and explore inequity during monthly counseling lessons.

One of the lessons I created was a version of Snakes and Ladders. I placed different situations children might encounter on a game board. In small groups we discussed the impact our behavior has. Children conversed about how we can help our classmates make good choices and how we can identify bullying and what we can do to combat these behaviors.

affirmations for each other. This has been truly uplifting and inspiring for these children.



I believe our proactive approach to teaching students to be kind and modeling positive behaviors allows our students to respect all people regardless of who they are.

PROVIDE EVIDENCE/PROOF OF EFFECTIVENESS SUCH AS, BUT NOT LIMITED TO: A QUESTIONNAIRE, INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENTED ANECDOTAL CONVERSATIONS, AND STUDENT WRITINGS, VIDEO, ETC.

To quote a fifth-grade student, "I now know that everybody has a story." Teaching children to be empathetic empowers children to see the good in everyone. In our school you can see a shift in kindness and respect for all students and teachers.

Below you will be able to see and hear examples of Big Cypress Students share their feelings about friendship and belonging. You will hear from them the impact about how being part of a supportive school enables them with awareness skills. Children are learning how to create a welcoming environment and making others feel part of the Big Cypress School family. Even a new student to BCE feels that she has a voice in the community.





Standing up for justice means to me, helping the little Jory's (myself) find their place in school. I only wish I had a new student club to help me feel included when I was lost. Having a peer mentor would have alleviated so much stress in my younger years. Standing up for justice means giving all students the ability to empathize with their peers. Empowering children to support each other provides a sense of inclusivity and offer a safe place for all.