



# ACE TESTIMONIALS

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Nicholas M. Gledich, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

SUCCESS CREATES SUCCESS  
(719) 328-2400  
FAX: (719) 448-0268

Christopher Kilroy, Principal  
Heidi Gugler, Asst. Principal  
Justin Weickum, Asst. Principal  
Kelly Gallegos, Coordinator  
Lelania Roberds, Secretary

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To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter of reference for Charmas Lee. Charmas worked as a structured mentor/teacher for a cohort of African American males at North Middle School. During this time Charmas focused on essential adaptive skills essential to academic and social success in and out of the school setting. His skills are extraordinary and success evident ( e.g. the growth on the CMAS assessment of the African American cohort at North Middle School surpassed all other sub groups including the Gifted and Talented population).

The process Charmas utilizes can be summarized in two words: grit and resiliency. His programming hones in on building essential skills; a process through which students develop a cognitive strategic plan that breaks larger issues into smaller more manageable ones. The focus on grit/resiliency affords his students the opportunity to internalize both problem solving skills and cognitive flexibility-skills essential to overcoming impediments and success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So with the aforementioned testimony, I can strongly recommend his programming. If you have any further questions please contact me at (719) 328-2402 or [christopher.kilroy@d11.org](mailto:christopher.kilroy@d11.org).

Chris Kilroy, Principal

North Middle School

## Achieving Competitive Excellence (A.C.E.)

### Charmas and Janice Lee

My name is Nate Hansen and I am fortunate enough to be the principal of John Adams Elementary School. I first had the privilege of meeting Charmas Lee last Spring when he attended a meeting with myself, former Superintendent Dr. Gledich, former Executive Director Brien Hodges, and Representative Tony Exum. That encounter led to a follow up meeting at John Adams that opened a door to the unique opportunity for students at John Adams Elementary.

John Adams Elementary is on a quest to provide an elite educational experience which grows the whole child, however we know we are faced with many challenges. Many of our students have experience some level of trauma and too many have grown up with chronic trauma. We recently completed an emotional screener that confirmed many of our students lack low self-efficacy, perseverance, and regulation skills. Some of the most alarming statistics are:

- 39% of students believe they will remember information from one year to the next
- 35% of students are sure they understand complicated ideas when discussed in class
- 41% of students are sure they can pull themselves out of a bad mood
- 38% of students say they can remain calm when someone is bothering them
- 56% of students believe they can control their emotions when needed

With such devastating thoughts compiled with social and emotional deficits the greatest classroom instruction is not going to be enough to get students to their ultimate level of success. It is clear from this data that our students need more than just great classroom instruction.

Schools are regularly presented with the next “great program” to improve student behavior, climate, and culture and school leaders are left to determine which, if any, are the right programs to meet their school’s needs. The ACE program was different from the beginning, and I knew I wasn’t just purchasing a program. I was partnering with a professional team in Charmas and Janice Lee. As a former John Adams student, Charmas had an invested interest in **our** community. He has a proven history of success on a variety of platforms, access to role models that our students can relate to, and someone with a plan that could be tailored to meet the needs of our students.

We started our ACE program in August of 2018 with 30 of our most impacted (most classroom behavior referrals, highest suspension rate, and highest risk) third through fifth grade students. Session by session we began witness the transformation of the 30 students. Students went from a lack of interest, laughing at the message Coach Lee was trying to send, and fighting amongst themselves during sessions to sharing success stories, acknowledging obstacles in their way and following through with Rule #1-Respect the Speaker. Just recently, students were connected with high school role models and they worked together to create vision boards. This partnership was an amazing display of the power of mentorship, and both sides walked away better for the experience.

That is not where the success stops. Other non-traditional measures of success have included students looking forward to ACE, often asking “do we have ACE today?” Students run up and hug Coach Lee when he visits Adams, Students share success stories of when they were going to be emotionally hijacked but instead remember the ace mantra “Think, Say, Do” and instead walked away, making a better choice. Teachers want to know more about the program and you’ll often see teachers stop in for an ACE session. Students who are not involved in ACE frequently ask to join, and comments such as “I wish my kid could have that” says it all.

What started as a great opportunity for our most challenged students, has clearly become a program for all kids. When more and more research is released around the intense pressures that today’s youth are facing around social media and bullying there is no doubt all kids could benefit from the opportunity to gain greater self-confidence, perseverance, and focus.

Unfortunately, the funding for programs such as the ACE program are as rare as this amazing program itself. We need individuals that believe in this program to pull together resources to support us on this life changing journey. Many of these students, who are just 10 or 11 years old have been struggling with regulating their emotions their entire lives and in just 12 short hours of work, they are changing. They are stopping, and thinking and making different choices. Can you imagine the possibilities if more students could get access to the ACE program? What if we could increase time with these students, get more students involved, and invest in the longevity and future of this program, and ultimately the future of these students and this community?

Respectfully, Nate  
Hansen  
Principal of John Adams Elementary



As a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at North Middle School, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Charmas and Janice once a week for nine weeks. I can testify that their program makes a significant difference in the lives of young adults. The ACE program is motivational, reflective, and educational. It stresses building a foundation for life by thinking positively, making connections, building resources, and stressing life skills that may not be taught by a traditional curriculum. Their materials help students organize thoughts, write about dreams, and consider where they are and where they want to go. Charmas and Janice are also charismatic and powerful speakers. They easily captivate an audience quickly and get the students to buy into their "Think, Say, Do" motto. Overall, I saw students at North leaving the ACE classes confident and uplifted. Without a doubt, the program is effective and could be implemented in a variety of ways.

Danny Dreyer, 7<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts Teacher

The ACE program with Charmas and Janice supports what we are doing here at Adams and what we are hoping to accomplish with our students. ACE, CKH, and PBIS all support the extensive need of our population. I know the kids are gaining real world skills that will help them not only in school but in life. Charmas has been where these kids are and is living proof that we are not the sum of our DNA. He gives these kids hope for a better life. I would love to have more time with the Lee's and see them more regularly. My hope is that they could provide boot camps for kids, field trips to training sessions, and be more interwoven in their life outside of the school walls.

-Brittany Graham, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

In the one year I've been with these kids there a few that stand out to me. There were students throwing punches, chairs, and anything they could get their hands on. Their ability for self-regulation was non-existent. This year those same students still have challenges but have drastically improved their ability to control their anger. They breathe, they think, they use strategies and they better communicate their feelings and what they are struggling with. They are starting to believe in themselves like we believe in them. It's a process but it's begun and I'm super proud of them.

-Elaina Richardson, TLC

We are in the second year of the ACE project. It started with a small group of students, but now Coach Lee has brought it to the masses. One thing I really like is, that, what Coach Lee teaches we can expand on in our class. A main teaching point that ACE has brought is Think Say Do. We have reinforced that when we made our vision boards for the new year. The students thought about their dreams and goals for life and for school (THINK) and then spoke them out loud in the form of a vision board (SAY). We also talked about steps to achieve those dreams which will help them succeed (DO).

Kim Devilbiss, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

Mr. and Mrs. Lee did an excellent job engaging the students with practical everyday lessons that the students could use immediately. The brilliance was that while they are daily lessons for the kids, they are helping to set them up for long term success as well. It was a well-designed unit and age appropriate. I saw students who would not consider themselves to be good at learning, paying attention and working.

Chris Rego, 7th Grade Math North MS

I find ACE a valuable resource for the school and especially my class. The students look forward to Mr. and Mrs. Lee's lessons and visits. My students are retaining the skills and information the Lee's convey. I personally find their involvement with the Adams community uplifting and motivating, for myself as well as my class. Their motivational tools like THINK SAY DO and WIN (what's important now) are assets to our staff and students. They are quick reminders, as well as motivators that grab the student's attention and focus them.

Trevor Burnley, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

We absolutely love ACE. The energy Charmas and Janice bring to this school is contagious. The kids ask for him to come in and look forward to their time with him. He brings something different and special to these kids that they relate to. He gets them and cares for them in a real tangible way. I have used some of the Think Say Do strategies in various situations. In an ideal setting we would have more of this program, more working in small groups, more in-depth work for our high-flyer kids, more time, and more consistency. We are so fortunate to have this for our kids and I absolutely value what the Lee's are doing here at Adams.

-Clare Mihalko, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

## Testimonial for The ACE Program

By: Patricia Dennard

1/19/2019

My name is Patricia Dennard and I am the school counselor for Adams Elementary in Colorado Springs School District 11. Before serving as Adam's school counselor, I worked as a residential care worker, a Court Appointed Special Advocate, a 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade looping teacher, a private Licensed Professional Counselor and a Behavior Interventionist. In my short 23 years in education, I have had the privilege to work with thousands of children and educators from a wide variety of backgrounds and developmental stages. I have also had the opportunity to meet some of the best mentors, trainers and fellow teachers in Colorado and the United States. I have also seen and experienced many challenging things during that time, and I am blessed because of the amazing children and adults that I have encountered over those years.

Charmas and Janice Lee, the founders of ACE, are some of the highest honored individuals that I have had the privilege to partner with in the support of children with significant challenges and their success. I met Coach Charmas and Janice Lee this year in my first year as the counselor at Adams Elementary. Our school was chosen to be a pilot school for additional mental health support due to our extremely impacted population. We have two mental health workers in addition to an assistant principal/dean and a principal because of the intense needs of our 430 students. Many of our students have experienced extreme poverty, homelessness, parents incarcerated, foster care, trauma from sexual, physical and emotional abuse and who also suffer from extreme attention difficulties and mental health issues. It truly takes a village to support and raise our children at Adams. Our principal, Nate Hansen, has been our fearless leader for many years and he sees the intense needs of our school. When Charmas, a former alum from Adams, approached Mr. Hansen and proposed his ACE program, Mr. Hansen knew that this was just what we needed to complete the circle of support that ultimately would lead to our students being academically successful, emotionally mature and extremely kind members of our community.

Charmas and Janice immediately offered to provide the program to some of our most impacted students. The students chosen had significant attendance, attention, behavioral and academic concerns. Sadly, before this year, many were concerned that these students would be in a perpetual cycle of self-destruction leading to eventual incarceration, drug or alcohol abuse and possibly dangerous risky behaviors leading to death. We needed something close to a miracle to intervene in these children's lives.

That miracle has been an amazing partnership with Charmas, Janice and their ACE approach. In the first few weeks, we were all concerned that we created a situation more than we could handle. Putting 40 of these high needs students together in one place proved to be very difficult to manage. In true Adams fashion, NO one would give up and "go back to the drawing board." We all believed in these kids and collectively, we know we could make the difference so they could finally experience success. It just reminded us that it takes time...LOTS and LOTS of time AND EFFORT! Every session, Coach Lee and Janice came in with a contagious attitude of success and assured everyone we would, find a way to get to YES! Over the following weeks, the magic really began. That group of students who were completely refusing to follow directions, rolling around on the ground, making snide comments and lude sounds began to morph into what looked like a cohesive team working for a common goal. In fact, children began to share stories about how they were applying the 30 second rule, using THINK SAY DO in times of extreme distress and how they were able to help each other do the "right" thing instead of adhering to the "bro code" with a death grip, and giving into negative "group think." I heard kids talking about how they were able to stay away from fights, walk away from potentially explosive situations and ultimately create a solution where they were a winner; a true champion!

There are so many success stories, but this is one of my favorites:

In one instance, I had a young man register at Adams who recently moved from LA. This student was, to say the least, very hardened at age 8. His father was in prison and he had clearly learned to survive in a very harsh reality. Every minute was a power struggle with adults and peers. He was in fights, running away from the school and causing property damage when he would explode with intense rage. This student made significant changes after attending ACE for a few months. Although the change was not immediate, or even noticeable at first, but looking at him now, you would not think this was the same child. Recently, I had the opportunity to work with him in a large group of other 3<sup>rd</sup> graders that were being defiant and aggressive to their teacher and each other. In fact, it was getting so bad, she literally could not teach and was considering other career options. The classroom was becoming very unsafe! I pulled these 12 children into a small group

intervention and worked with them for most of the day developing the concept of empathy and school success skills. The students were not being respectful to me either, so I completely understood the teachers plight. Suddenly, this hardened student, who was generally the ring leader for defiance and resistance, yelled loudly at the group and said, "Ms. Dennard is trying to help us. Now listen to her, you fools." I was completely stunned. Every one of the kids stopped messing around and were quiet. In fact, he didn't stop there. He continued by saying that his dad was in prison and he asked them if they wanted to end up like his father. He said, "If you don't want to be in prison and have your life a mess, then shut up!" Ok, I was not super happy that he had called them fools and told them to shut up, but the message was clear, and it came from the person they most respected, which was clearly not me! It was a miracle that I attribute to the ACE program and the loving care and unwillingness to ever give up on a child. It truly is the Adams Elementary "way." This student could feel the care and support he was offered, felt the success he desired and knew that he wanted the group to feel the same things. This student often shares about his success stories in ACE and he is one of the biggest helpers in the school in terms of "making it real" for others. I would like to think that I, as the school counselor, made the difference that day, but the reality is that this young man provided the message to those who needed it in the way they understood it. We know, little by little, we made a difference for him by giving him the tools, the opportunities to practice with grace and the support he needed to make it his reality. I am ever thankful to Charmas and Janice for offering to take this student into that group. The program did for him what I never could. I could not speak the language in the way he needed to hear it and inspire him like Coach Lee did. In addition, I think the chocolate chip cookies that Janice also baked for the kids made a big difference for him as well...I know it did for me 😊

At Adams Elementary, we sincerely thank Charmas and Janice Lee for their unwavering dedication to supporting those who truly need it! I have learned so many tricks to my own trade of counseling just by being a bystander during the lessons. I appreciate the opportunity to partner with them this year and for many years to come! Schools, kids, teachers and parents NEED the ACE Program!

Patricia Dennard  
School Counselor

Adams Elementary in Colorado Springs School District 11.