



BE BRAVE, BE KIND:
DIFFERENT
IS THE NEW COOL

Peer Awareness Initiative

Pilot Program

K. Alfonso & AES Parents

Atholton Elementary School



Have you heard the news? **DIFFERENT** IS THE NEW COOL!!!

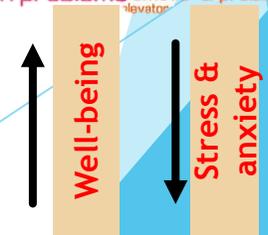


BE BRAVE, BE KIND:
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Vision

Build a tool kit of activities and information that can help prepare our children to embrace differences in the world. Give families the tools to build the skills of **empathy** and **kindness** that will help their children form meaningful relationships and understand problems through the perspectives of others.

"If we understand DIFFERENCES, we can EMBRACE them"



Why this “peer awareness” initiative?

- ▶ We are a group of moms, parents of amazing kids with “extraordinary abilities and differences” that know first hand the need in society for empathy and kindness to be emphasized.
- ▶ We know the importance of educating the community about the **differences** that surround our world (e.g. physical, emotional, neurological, intellectual, socio-economic, cultural and religious differences)
- ▶ We understand that for our kids (and everyone else) to “fit in” and socially succeed amongst their regularly-developing peers, we need to put an effort into teaching other children to **UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT ABILITIES** of their peers, **be ACCEPTING**, be **genuinely KIND** and learn skills to **FORGE MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS**.
- ▶ As parents and educators, we can **TEAM UP** to provide developmentally and age-appropriate knowledge and explanations; knowledge is POWER.
 - ▶ It’s important that kids learn early on that no two people are born the same and that sometimes these differences are more noticeable. Kids need to understand that EVERYONE has unique abilities, strengths and challenges.
- ▶ Most importantly, we want to **EMPOWER FAMILIES** and provide an opportunity for parents to engage in these conversations with their kids.
 - ▶ The foundation of empathetic values starts at home. A family's structure, function, roles, beliefs, attitudes, and ideals influence this outcome.

“ Go beyond acceptance to true kindness”

Building the foundations for EMPATHY and KINDNESS

- ▶ Studies suggest that shaping an EMPATHETIC AND KIND environment will result in:
 - ▶ Higher engagement
 - ▶ Higher academic achievement
 - ▶ Stronger and more positive classroom community
 - ▶ Stronger communication skills
 - ▶ **Bullying prevention**
 - ▶ Less aggressive behaviors and emotional disorders
 - ▶ More positive relationships

***KINDNESS is CONTAGIOUS
So PASS IT ON!***

Embracing Differences and Teaching Kindness

- ▶ Provide the staff the tools needed to teach developmentally appropriate activities to reinforce the meaning of different abilities without the fears of “labels” towards kids
 - ▶ Some activities will be to reinforce the topic of *embracing differences*. Highlight values that exemplify kindness, respect, honesty, bravery etc.
 - ▶ Other activities will provide the tools for management and self regulation
 - ▶ Activities will carry topics like cultural, socio-economic, physical and emotional differences
 - ▶ And some activities will be carried out to highlight “disabilities” **without emphasis on any kid’s special need but just the differences behind it**. What makes the “difference” unique. Not drawing attention to a particular kid that may or may not know about their situation. This conversation is one for families to have in the privacy of their home.
 - ▶ e.g. An activity will not call draw attention to any child or label anyone.
 - ▶ Staff/teacher carrying out lesson will be aware of the topic, however the point is to highlight the **difference in abilities**
 - ▶ If we can teach, for example, in science about the different systems in the human body, we can definitely adapt to teach about differences and uniqueness

Enabling teachers and staff to help build Empathy and Kindness in their classroom

- ▶ Activities for Staff to explain multiple topics to kids (e.g. explain emotions, self-regulation, sensory differences, various “different/extraordinary abilities” etc.)
 - ▶ Option 1: Teachers can practice activity during Content
 - ▶ Books, to-do activities
 - ▶ Mini experiments to describe “differences”
 - ▶ Awareness month fun sing-alongs
- ▶ ***** We have compiled a list of potential topics to discuss; supplies will be provided if needed***
 - ▶ *Topics Need to be discussed with Administration, School Psychologist and Counselors and others in the committee to verify the way the activity is presented is age and developmentally appropriate*
- ▶ Option 2: School Administrators could select a class during related arts in a rotation system to practice an activity
- ▶ **Playbook will include (by activity) the following sections:**
 - ▶ **Activity justification, Step-by-Step, Materials and Facilitators Notes / Instructions**

Empowering Families

- ▶ Some activities are **parent-focus** to empower families to discuss topics at home. It allows us to be an example for our kids
 - ▶ It could stimulate conversations at the dinner table and encourage questions
- ▶ Parent volunteers will be organized and carry out some of the planned activities or will look into leveraging resources (e.g. HCPSS Family Resources, private providers)
- ▶ **Workshops for parents**
 - ▶ It is key to have the parents understand the reasoning behind these initiatives. Also provide them with awareness on topics so they can be informed. This will allow for better discussion at home if they choose to.
 - ▶ We are looking to have providers (therapists, centers, organizations) be the source for these workshops as part of the activities within the initiative. We are looking into HCPSS resources as well as external partners.
 - ▶ During these workshops is where we could address a topic more “specifically”
 - ▶ Executive Functions
 - ▶ Self-regulation Strategies
 - ▶ Talk discussing various disabilities (to provide knowledge of the topic)
 - ▶ Talks about cultural differences and social impact
 - ▶ Links added in the Awareness Letter as resources

List of Potential Topics to Highlight (DRAFT)

- ▶ General
 - ▶ Values of Kindness
 - ▶ Lessons on Empathy
 - ▶ Understanding DIFFERENCES that surround us
- ▶ Social/Emotional Health
 - ▶ Understanding Emotions
 - ▶ Self-regulation
 - ▶ Executive Functions
 - ▶ Sensory Processing & Needs
 - ▶ Cooperative Learning
 - ▶ Well Being/Reducing Anxiety
- ▶ Disabilities (presented as **unique abilities** of others to highlight social awareness and to enhance interactions with peers)
 - ▶ Autism - understand the differences and unique abilities
 - ▶ Down Syndrome
 - ▶ Auditory Processing
 - ▶ ADD/ADHD
 - ▶ Dyslexia
- ▶ Social/Cultural Diversity
 - ▶ Ethnic & Cultural Diversity
 - ▶ Understanding the word CULTURE and cultures of the world
 - ▶ Learn about cultural differences and similarities
 - ▶ Learn about cultural beliefs and traditions
 - ▶ Building Blocks to Prevent Discrimination

Potential Topics & Timeline (1st year)- **DRAFT**

- MAY/JUNE - Send a flyer at the end of school year to highlight the new initiative, purpose and the HCPSS support and respond to implementation.
- SEPTEMBER - OFFICIAL LAUNCH! HCPSS Personnel will attend to highlight importance and alignment with their vision in various areas (e.g Strategic Planning for Special Ed, Diversity and Inclusion) - **SEE NEXT SLIDE**

Date/Month	Topic	Activities	
		Kids	Parents
October	Highlight Values of Kindness & Empathy, Understanding DIFFERENCES, Down Syndrome Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kind Hearts Wall Activity (all) • Activities by Grade to talk about DIFFERENCES • Books to chat about topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Parent to Parent Coffee & Conversations
November	Understanding Emotions & Self Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities by Grade (e.g. Sensory Bottle) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee and Conversation
December	Understanding the word CULTURE and cultures of the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange stories about food, clothing and traditions. Activities will vary by grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and Inclusion Seminar
January	Well Being/Reducing Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities by Grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop
February	Executive Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities by Grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee and Conversation with Providers
March	Learn about cultural differences and similarities (International NIGHT)	INTERNATIONAL NIGHT	INTERNATIONAL NIGHT
April	Autism Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities by Grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop For Parents
May	TOPIC REVIEW	NO ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAKE AND TAKE for Parents

LAUNCH - September 2018

▶ **Launch in Full the Initiative by Engaging with Families First**

- ▶ Plan an **“AWARENESS NIGHT”** for Parents to come in the evening, hear about the initiative and the mission moving forward.
 - ▶ “Chew & Chat” - finger food provided on tables to not distract from time
 - ▶ Child care provided
- ▶ **HCPSS Personnel will Support.**
 - ▶ This initiative aligns with the vision of HCPSS. It originated from the needs within the Strategic Planning for Special Ed and it has received the support from the county as having a [potential to become a pilot program](#)
 - ▶ It has been discussed with Dr. Terry Savage and Emily Kinsler (DES) and Mr. LeMon (Parent & Community Outreach)
 - ▶ Invite Dr. Martirano, Dr. Savage, Mr. Gilbert (Diversity & Inclusion), Dr. LeMon
- ▶ Plan an activity where parents get to know each other’s by sharing experiences
 - ▶ Plan a **“4 corner’s activity”**. This is where folks forms groups based on how they answer very unique diversity-directed questions
 - ▶ E.g. Who’s a parent of a special need child? Who follows religious practices at home? etc
 - ▶ We have to make sure the questions highlight differences
- ▶ Survey the Parents. This will help in researching topics that are of interest

General Activities

- ▶ **Color me kind. Color the cafeteria with positive messages**
 - ▶ Design messages/phrases/word clouds with encouraging and positive empathetic messages
 - ▶ Discuss with art teacher for feedback/design
 - ▶ Parent volunteers will paint!
- ▶ **Kind hearts wall activity**
 - ▶ **Hearts on the wall activity** on the cafeteria on monthly rotations that will include the names of kids that have done an act of kindness
 - ▶ Help a friend, work towards a goal, get to know a “new friend” etc
 - ▶ Awareness letter will send home the info/explanation of the concept and 2 hearts so parents can write their kids names if/when they do an act of kindness at home
 - ▶ Teachers will have “hearts” for students who do those acts at school and peers can nominate peers that have done something amazing 😊
 - ▶ It will offer a reward for the kids
 - ▶ May be combined with PBIS tickets?
- ▶ **Atholton Kindness Week**
 - ▶ Each Day of the week a different topic could be feature

General Activities Cont'd

- ▶ International/ Cultural Night
 - ▶ Maybe around May and June timeframe. Have families participate and share their culture!!
 - ▶ Music, food and attire will highlight the amazing differences that brings us together
- ▶ Theater-based activities (skits) for kids (~3x times a year)
 - ▶ Smaller than an assembly. To be given during related arts too potentially.
 - ▶ Ideas: Puppet shows that will explain various concepts (e.g. disabilities, inclusion, kindness etc)
- ▶ Currently brainstorming ideas for activities to be done during the various “awareness months” that we could highlight at AES
 - ▶ e.g. **Autism awareness**
 - ▶ *Have the staff wear “puzzle” socks or something “puzzle” to highlight autism awareness...*
 - ▶ *We can have the kids do various activities with Legos, Puzzles, etc*
 - ▶ *I recently had a group of kids try to build “a lego ball” with pieces that were meant for a different shape*
 - ▶ *After they tried it, kids mentioned how the ball “looked different” but it could be use as a ball still*
 - ▶ *We took the opportunity to explain how our brain’s worked and looked at things differently but with a little help and imagination could achieve similar things.*

General Activities Cont'd

- ▶ Buddy Program
 - ▶ Book Buddy
 - ▶ Pair Older kids and little ones
 - ▶ Bench Buddy (during recess or lunch)
 - ▶ Simply share a smile with a friend sitting next to you.
 - ▶ Pay a compliment to a friend
 - ▶ Talk/ask about a topic of interest to spark conversation

HELP US SPREAD KINDNESS, AWARENESS
AND ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT'S UNIQUE TO
SOME AND UNKNOWN TO MANY