

Ewing Elementary School

School Advocacy Program 2016-2017

Creating a unique climate and culture in which all students feel welcome, safe, and secure is the responsibility of the school community. This is especially important in an elementary school where students are learning who they can trust and turn to in difficult situations.

During the 2015-16 school year, Ewing Elementary School formed a task force to address a growing concern about the deteriorating culture and climate of our school. The school had been in great academic decline and we lacked student advocacy, which our students needed if they were to grow socially and emotionally. We wanted every student to have a least one adult in the building with whom they could connect in a non-academic relationship.

In the early fall of 2015, a leadership team began to develop a student advocacy program that would be implemented immediately.

The leadership team decided that each paraprofessional, custodian, Family Resource, administrator and teacher in the school would serve as an adult advocate to a group of 10–15 students and that these groups would meet every month for 30 minutes during a designated time within the school day.

5th Quarter

Our 5th Quarter student advocacy-focused lessons have spurred dynamic discussions on a variety of topics and provided an outlet for students to share within a familiar, safe, small-group setting. The result is student self-confidence and stronger, more sincere, peer relationships with the support and guidance of an adult advocate. Staff members often report hearing students use terms from lessons in peer conversations and seeing them put into practice strategies they have learned through 5th Quarter.

Each lesson begins with an icebreaker that suits the personality and needs of the group. The icebreaker is followed by a focus lesson that addresses the pre-determined theme. 5th Quarter leaders have the freedom to “tweak” the lesson to fit the needs of their group and grade level. Often lessons are centered on STEM or STEAM activities.

During our initial year of implementation, all grade levels followed the same theme – Team Building. As we began our second year, however, we felt confident enough in our program to diversify and have each grade level choose the themes for the year.

The Principal’s assigned team is the Principal’s Cabinet. In addition to activities, they also provide the principal with a plus/delta in order for student voice to be heard.

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A School-wide Effort

One of the primary goals of our 5th Quarter student advocacy initiative is to empower students to be reflective and act respectfully, responsibly, and compassionately each and every day. Because it is a school-wide initiative, we expect all teachers to have input in planning and decision making. Collaboration is essential to the success of this initiative.

Communication is a key to success. Our school website and Facebook page include 5th Quarter posts. 5th Quarter leaders also take time to meet informally with their students during the month to check in on their grades, attendance, or other issues they may be facing. This lets the students know they have an adult looking out for them and show concern.

Our Reality

Initiating, developing, and implementing a student advocacy program has not been an easy task. Some of our barriers have included scheduling difficulties, lack of time to plan lessons, lack of group meeting space, and unforeseen leader absence on lesson day.

Although there have been some roadblocks, we stick with the motto, "Relationships matter." We continue to maintain a positive attitude and move forward.

It is hard to measure matters of the heart, but it is very clear that students are learning life-long lessons during 5th Quarter. Growing evidence indicates that 5th Quarter is becoming our new school culture. Students and teachers are acting with more compassion, cooperation, empathy, respect for others, kindness, and giving as our program continues to grow. We attribute this positive change to the 5th Quarter lessons we teach and our staff and students put into action in our caring community.

Ewing Elementary's Full Value Contract

1. I agree to keep each other safe, physically and emotionally.
2. I agree to keep comments positive and supportive.
3. I agree to give and receive honest feedback.
4. I agree to "let go" of negative feelings and/or stale issues and move on.
5. I agree to make an effort to participate to the best of my ability in all situations.