

'CONVERSATION TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE': Collinsville Middle School's Pink Elephant Project

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The following article is presented as part of the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities' "Conversations Toward A Brighter Future" discussion series.

The articles are prepared by the participants of the discussion in their own words.

COLLINSVILLE - The **Collinsville Middle School** project “Pink Elephant” is in its second year, and is off to a positive start. The goal of the “**Pink Elephant**” is to **Respect** each other and not judge others based on differences. This is a societal issue because people do not take the time to get to know others who are different, causing fear and resentment.

The “Pink Elephant” project includes activities that will bring awareness to our student body and help create better relationships. We believe that this project will further help our youth to heal from negative personal experiences and to help us to do better in the future.

Positive activities will be scheduled on a regular basis that help make everyone to feel better about themselves. Dialogue will consist of conversations about both the good and bad things that happen in our lives in order to promote understanding towards each other. Student surveys will be used to determine the effectiveness of our efforts and to determine how well our peers are treating each other.

The Pink Elephant Project was kicked off with a pep assembly where a student was dressed in a pink elephant costume, symbolizing the “Pink Elephant” in the room. We began the assembly by informing students about our project, but not explaining why the “Pink Elephant” was standing in the center of the floor. We had everyone’s attention and began discussing the importance of respect and not judging others based on differences.

Our second activity is called “Smile Statements.” Students write a compliment about his /her peers then exchange the compliments. They can send this anonymously if they prefer. Our objective for this activity is to make sure people feel good about themselves. We have found that most of our peers verbally hurt others because they do not have positive self-esteem. Some students rarely receive compliments; therefore, our goal is to make sure they receive a positive comment!

Students are encouraged to use Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat or some other social media to make positive comments about their peers. We believe this will discourage student bullying and harassment. We want this effort to go viral throughout our school.

#pinkelephantproject. We will develop a bulletin board listing activities on how respect and kindness are being spread throughout the building. Video segments will be recorded focusing on the four pillars of Respect, Dignity, Understanding, & Forgiveness.

We will evaluate the effectiveness of our movement in three ways:

- Students will respond to prompts related to the videos assessing the choices that they would make in the given situation and those responses will be compared over time.
- Administration will assist us in monitoring discipline offenses with the expectation of a reduction of occurrences over time.
- We will monitor participation in the **#pinkelephantproject** over time and look for an increase in Caught You Being Good tickets submitted by teachers, as well as an increase in social media hits.

The Pink Elephant project promotes positive feelings among the students and staff of Collinsville Middle School. PEP floods social media with positive messages and encouragement with the goal of making messages and videos ‘go viral’.

Key Highlights

- Students will choose and recognize a Teacher of the Month.
- Teachers will choose and recognize a Student of the Month.
- Students will be selected on a weekly basis for performing good deeds toward others. These students will receive a wrist band that says *Caught You Being Good*.