

'CONVERSATION TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE': Coolidge Junior High School's 'We Are Brave' 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.

The Coolidge Junior High School project "We are Brave," in its second year, is off to a positive start. Our focus is to create a culture of positive attitudes and respect among our school community through "We Are BRAVE!". BRAVE is our school mascot and will be used as an acronym for "Believe, Respect, Accountability, Value, and Excellence".

We want to build greater respect in our school community by creating a better understanding of it and how it impacts decisions, actions, and interactions, whether face to face or through social media. Our student group sees this as a multi-level challenge. Building respect translates, in our opinion, to respect for school, respect between students, between students and teachers, and among teachers. Understanding respect and the inherent value of the individual fosters dignity and sets the stage for understanding and forgiveness.

The center piece of our school project is “Be BRAVE.” Success will be measured using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data in order to drive decision making processes. We will use data from, Skyward, our student data information system to generate reports for analysis of numbers of discipline referrals and location of disciplinary issues comparing to last year’s numbers for the quantitative portion. We will also survey staff and students to get information about perceptions of our school culture and changes since the onset of the program.

Our student leadership will facilitate lessons through classroom visits, study hall sessions, and multi-media productions. The lessons will be displayed in the classroom at various times of the day, with teachers and administration assisting the coordination of events.

We will launch a social media campaign and intend to primarily use an Instagram account utilizing a hashtag to connect with students and families through posts of pictures and messages about BRAVE and to send positive, anti-bullying messages.

Motivational speakers will be scheduled to discuss the importance of positive school culture and the impact that social media can play. School assemblies are an extension of the program. The district website system allows our staff to incorporate the school to control content. Through this, our administrators will incorporate “We Are BRAVE” information for student and family access.

Our School Resource Officer (SRO) will support the BRAVE program in his lessons involving social media. A committee of teachers working in conjunction with our student group has volunteered to take part in the effort by working with students to design and incorporate specific lessons and activities that all teachers can use in their classroom to target each of the parts of the BRAVE acronym.

The BRAVE curriculum will be implemented on a certain day of the week and the focus of each attribute will be as follows:

B – Believe: Believe in yourself and your community.

Believe in your future.

Believe you can make a difference.

R – Respect: Respect yourself.

Respect one another.

Respect your school.

Respect your community.

A – Accountability: Accountability for your actions.

Accountability for your words.

Accountability for your learning.

Accountability for yourself.

V – Value: Value solutions, not just problems.

Value help and be helpful to others.

Value kindness and be kind to others.

E – Excellence: Excellence is doing your best.

Excellence is what you should expect from yourself.

Excellence is good citizenship.

Students are encouraged to adopt the BRAVE attitude. The letters in BRAVE stand for *Believe, Respect, Accountability, Value, and Excellence* and are used in a matrix for discussing desired and appropriate behaviors in various areas of the school such as the hallways, gym, classrooms, cafeteria, and restrooms.

Brave Cards

Any staff member can nominate a student they see exhibiting BRAVE traits by giving them a BRAVE Card that is put in a drawing each week in recognition of their positive efforts.

Positive Messages

- Sidewalk chalk messages were drawn on the front walkway.
- Pictures of students engaged in various school activities were displayed on the walls.
- Teachers have adopted a common set of classroom expectations that were discussed with students throughout the school.
- A Coolidge staff and student video was used in the first Welcome Back Rally featuring a Granite City High School alumni guest speaker. The focus of the rally was school spirit and inclusiveness.

Motivational Mondays

Study Hall teachers show selected videos to inspire students or homemade videos that highlight students and staff to promote school spirit and mutual understanding.