



Morton Ranch Junior High No Place for Hate representatives Betsy Irwin, Doreen Martinez, Amanda Lara, Vanessa Whitehead, Mark McCord, Cindy Lamm, and Jordan Bates

Katy ISD campuses discuss the importance of this anti-bullying campaign

Written by Kirsten Cornell | Photography by Anetrius Wallace

The No Place for Hate initiative, which launched in schools in 2001 by the Anti-Defamation League, provides educators and students with the resources to ensure that anti-bias and diversity education are an integral part of the school curriculum. “Our campus made the decision to pursue the No Place for Hate campus designation because we felt it was important for all students to feel accepted, valued, and respected for their individual differences,” says Doreen Martinez, assistant principal at Morton Ranch Junior High. “We also wanted to provide an opportunity to bring attention to bullying and help educate students on the negative effects of teasing, ostracism, intimidation, and rumor spreading.”

EARNING THE DESIGNATION

The Anti-Defamation League asks that designated campuses hold meetings to discuss the initiative with the students and discuss active ways in which they can participate. “Students sign a resolution of respect and in doing so, they commit

to ensuring that our school is a No Place for Hate campus,” explains Cimarron Elementary counselor Elizabeth Kratz. “Children spend most of their time with us, and we are the guiding factor in their lives. We want to make sure they understand differences not only in themselves, but in others as well.”

Stephens Elementary planned a “mix it up” at lunch where students were encouraged to invite students they didn’t know to sit and eat with them. “The goal was to make sure every student was included and felt welcome,” says Stephanie Vaughan, the school’s principal. Their culminating activity to-date has been a school-wide diversity concert, including a repertoire of songs representing different cultures.

At Morton Ranch, their No Place for Hate (NPH) Club meets at the beginning of the year to select three activities that will address appreciating differences, respect, kindness towards

"It is our responsibility to educate our students about acceptance and model it."

- Stephanie Vaughan,
Stephens Elementary principal



Stephens Elementary anti-bullying advocates Yvette Sylvan, Caitlyn McCollum, Timothy Park, Stephanie Vaughan, Gabriel Santana, Samantha Boyer, and Alejandra Huerta



Cimarron Elementary students with their No Place for Hate leaders Holly Heiman, Brooke Foreman, Elizabeth Kratz, Saneé Bell, and Tanya Hughey

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others, and anti-bullying efforts on campus. This year, the NPH club chose to have a Bullying Awareness Month which included a Unity Day where the entire school wore orange in support of bringing an end to bullying.

Club members also utilized technology to research various celebrities who had been bullied as teenagers during their Celebrity Bully Quotes event. "Students designed graphics with celebrity names and quotes about their personal experiences," explains Martinez. "The goal was to help students understand that even famous celebrities had experienced, and were able to overcome, the negative effects of bullying." The students also plan to create a multimedia presentation about how bullying impacts a student's life.

THE SCARRING TRUTH

According to the National Education Association, it is estimated that 160,000 children miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students. "Schools need to be a safe place for students and staff. No one should feel like they don't belong," says Saneé Bell, Cimarron's principal. "Bullying excludes others and is damaging emotionally. It can take years to heal the scars that occur from acts of bullying, and it is important that we eradicate it from our schools."

Children who are bullied can experience negative physical, school, and mental health issues. Martinez believes that because bullying can take on various forms, many students experience bullying in some way. Morton Ranch's goal



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Principal Stephanie
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when working with students who are experiencing bullying is to help them understand that the bully has the issue, not them. "I want our students to feel confident in themselves and take a more assertive position by taking the appropriate steps to stop bullying," adds Martinez.

Vaughan understands that what her students are learning in elementary school impacts how they will behave in the future and interact with others long after they have left the Stephens campus. "Young children are very impressionable, and they emulate what is modeled," she says. "It is our responsibility to educate our students about acceptance and model it." She adds that students know that bullying and disrespectfulness will not be tolerated, "We continue to have high expectations for how our students and staff treat one another."

UNITED AGAINST BULLYING

Part of preventing campus bullying is providing outlets for students to report incidents or discuss any issue they may be having in a safe environment. "Safety Net" has been utilized at several Katy ISD campuses and proven effective. "The safety net box is located in the library and students can fill out a form and drop it off. It is then checked by the school counselor," explains Vaughan. "Students are encouraged to tell any adult that they are most comfortable confiding in as soon as possible."

Campuses have noticed a significant difference in the atmosphere since accepting the NPH Challenge. At Cimarron, Kratz notes that children feel more free to talk to others and communicate their needs when they need assistance. "It has created a positive environment. Our students are very accepting of others and seek out help when they feel that someone is not being treated with respect," she says. "Since this is our fifth year of being a NPH campus, we can see the difference in the level of respect and acceptance of individual differences and backgrounds," adds Vaughan. Stephens Elementary has plans to expand their diversity book club and continue with programs that celebrate diversity through fine arts and in the classroom.

Martinez maintains that is important for students to know how to be proactive in addressing negative behavior by finding peaceful solutions and relying on staff to help keep them safe. "We have seen an awareness of the NPH club at Morton Ranch. Our students know that we are united with the campus to put an end to bullying," she adds.

"Cimarron is a family, and we want all of our children to feel safe when they come to school. If students do not feel safe, they will not learn," explains Kratz. "By teaching students that hate is not tolerated and that kindness is the right thing, students are more likely to have positive attitudes about themselves and others."

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KIRSTEN CORNELL is the lead associate editor for Katy Magazine. She has seen the effects of campus bullying and applauds Katy ISD for taking an active stand against it.

NO PLACE FOR HATE CAMPUSES IN KATY ISD

*Bear Creek Elementary, Cimarron Elementary,
Fielder Elementary, Holland Elementary, McMeans Junior
High School, Morton Ranch Junior High School,
Stephens Elementary, and Williams Elementary*

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