



Cowichan Valley School District

NEWS RELEASE

March 31, 2017

For Immediate Release

Roots of Empathy: One of Many Approaches to Foster Safe Schools

Shaw TV recently completed a feature on the Roots of Empathy program in Cowichan Schools. This proven program teaches children about a baby's development. In addition, students demonstrate long lasting increases in pro social behaviour. And Mom and baby bring joy and laughter each time they visit.

The District has high standards for pro social behaviour, starting at the Board level with the District's values statement. Each school has a Code of Conduct and it's up to teachers, staff and parents to model patience and compassion. The core curriculum addresses navigating social interactions, self-regulation, and how to advocate for oneself and others.

Teachers and administrators report that acts of kindness and friendly relations outweigh negative interactions by far. Given a caring community and structure, students respond in kind.

When things go wrong, the process has to start with informing an adult - teacher, parent, counsellor. When students don't feel comfortable approaching an adult - they can go to the provincial Erase Bullying website for help. In fact, the site has resources for students and parents on many aspects of social development.

The school starts an investigation as soon as they are advised of the situation. The situation is resolved through talking and counselling for the victim, aggressor and families. The goal is to follow through by helping students learn skills for self advocacy, responses to difficult situations, and to have a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives. In short, pro social behaviours that helps kids have the strength of character to care for themselves and others throughout their lives. The process may not be a short one, and families should be prepared to support their kids throughout the resolution.

The same process applies to online situations. Anytime a student faces a threat to their well-being, the school will help find a solution.

Pink Shirt Day and Compassion Week are held each February to celebrate caring cultures. Activities include assemblies, random acts of kindness, music, song, dance ... and of course, pink shirts. Secondary students plan and run their own Compassion Week. Jennifer Tudway-Cains championed compassion week at Frances Kelsey Secondary School. She says the goal is to get everyone "...learning about the importance of compassion, what it means to display it, along with having some fun throughout."

School Board Chair Candace Spilsbury stated, "The District and the new curriculum embrace the position that emotional well being is a foundation for learning. It takes diligence, collaboration and compassion to maintain schools that are safe for everyone."

When asked about the value of Compassion Week, Ms. Tudway-Cains responds, " I definitely think and hope that all the effort we put into making this week helps everyone and makes them want to be compassionate for the rest of the year and every day after the school year."

Websites:

Shaw Feature on Roots of Empathy in SD 79

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iaA6J_e2gs&feature=em-share_video_user

Roots of Empathy

<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>

Erase Bullying

<http://erasebullying.ca/index.php>

School District Strategic Priorities Plan

<http://sd79.bc.ca/documents/2016/11/strategic-priorities.pdf>

Human Knot

<https://www.education.com/activity/article/untangle-group-knot/>

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