Diversity Appreciation: The Longfellow Middle School Approach

By Rosina Keren

The Counseling program at Longfellow Middle School in Berkeley, California, provides holistic integrated services to a diverse population of adolescents. Our program is holistic and integrated because: (1) we promote positive behavior at the individual, interpersonal, and school-wide levels; (2) which is tended by all counseling, administrative, teaching, support and custodial staff; (3) shared with parents through telephone blasts and counseling services; and (4) nourished on a regular basis by collaborations between the counselors, teachers, and students. In short, our program seeks to capitalize on every meaningful opportunity to support our middle schoolers’ social/emotional development.

For example, we encourage our students to find areas in which they shine and learn to take pride in themselves. We create opportunities for our students to develop empathy and appreciate differences. Also, we provide readily-available help to constructively resolve conflicts, and through a variety of means, foster a positive school-wide culture.

In September each year, we launch the “Be An Ally” campaign, which lasts until the end of the school year. This campaign shapes the school culture because it is intertwined throughout the year via assemblies, classroom workshops, counseling groups, and in 1-1 counseling.

We teach students how to be safe and how to confront a bullying situation. We empower our students by training them as peer mediators and educators in the anti-bullying campaign. Finally, we make it safe and easy for a student to seek help if he or she is being bullied by any person at Longfellow.

Standing up against bullying is just one piece of our efforts to develop a positive, supportive, and welcoming school atmosphere. Teaching Channel’s video illustrates one of our many efforts to encourage pro-social behavior in our school community. Below we offer some specifics that have made our program a success:

1. “Be An Ally” Campaign: A Holistic Approach Against Bullying
   - Inform students through psycho-education on the effects of bullying in assemblies and classroom workshops led by students
   - Focus on empathy building activities by sharing stories and modeling empathy and positive regard
   - Honor the diversity of our student body by actively celebrating: African American Pride, Latino Heritage Pride, Asian-Pacific Islander Pride, and Caucasians for Justice Awareness, & Multi-Racial Pride
   - Ongoing race specific support groups, such as Latina Girls Group, African American Boys group, Multi Racial students group
   - Celebrating Teaching Tolerance’s Mix It Up Day, encouraging our students to have friends across racial boundaries. This also includes the annual process of making a movie to encourage diversity appreciation
   - Run an active GSA and addressing homophobic behavior or comments in real time with student-counselor interventions
   - Increase emotional intelligence thru 1-1 counseling, group counseling and peer mediation
2. Immersion in Our Four School Expectations: Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be An Ally

We make sure these expectations are prominent -- *i.e.* well-known, visible, communicated and celebrated in the following ways:

- Administrators communicate the message in assemblies and in interactions with students
- Teachers accentuate the monthly theme
- Through pre-planned lessons, warm up exercises, and/or communicating it in the form of classroom expectations
- School safety officers and all staff (subject matter and PE teachers, custodians, after school staff, cafeteria staff, library staff, and athletic department staff) are aware of and promote these behavioral and interpersonal expectations.
- Counselors on the yard and in the halls, in groups and 1-1 sessions promote pro-social behavior
- Students become leaders and positive role models by leading workshops, becoming cross-age mentors, and peer mediators
- Counselors work with students to produce a monthly magazine which emphasizes the monthly theme and highlights pro-social behavior
- Counseling department engages parents in our goals through PTA, weekly phone blasts, and print media.

3. Whole School Interventions

- Students read morning announcements over the P.A. system, reminding all of school expectations and monthly themes
- Monthly assembly establish the theme, which is reinforced in lunch time activities, student-led workshops, teachers' messages, and Tiger Tickets, an incentive program rewarding positive behavior
- Student-made movies, promoting the positive behavioral goal of the month, which is shown in the monthly assemblies

4. Classroom Interventions

- Pre-designed workshops are provided to each teacher from the point of view of their subject matter
- Classroom workshops led by leadership students

5. Peer Group Interventions

- Social skills groups
- Shared issues counseling groups
- Conflict mediation
- Counselor-led lunch-time support groups
- Restorative Justice with SEEDS

6. Individual Interventions

- Counseling to address underlying emotional trauma and needs to improve emotional intelligence and positive peer interactions
- Family sessions, parent education, resources, community collaborations and referrals