

Integration, Anti-bullying, and Conquering fears: Integration dollars give students a once in a lifetime opportunity to connect with their peers.

December 2nd and 3rd, Southland and Ellis Middle School's 8th grade students participated in a day long Youth Frontiers Courage retreat. This was the 4th consecutive year that 8th graders had the opportunity to participate in a Youth Frontiers Courage retreat due to the generosity of funding supplied through the Austin/Southland Integration Collaborative.

Youth Frontiers, a nonprofit organization, has been delivering programs to schools for over 20 years that build positive school communities and help young people realize the importance of respecting themselves and others. The YF vision is to change the way young people treat each other in every hallway, lunch line, and classroom of every school in America so that today's young people can make tomorrow's world better. Last year, Youth Frontiers worked with nearly 100,000 students and educators throughout the country.

Nearly 350 8th grade youth as well as 80 juniors and seniors from Southland and Austin High School National Honor Society participated in this year's Courage Retreat. Participants engaged in activities that encourage students to accept people for who they are, resist following the crowd, and act with moral courage despite their fears. YF Retreat Staff gave 2 topic-based large group talks during the retreat. The first talk focused on fear and pressure to follow the crowd, along with how fear can keep students from acting with courage. The second talk focused on courage, and the admirable action of choosing to act with courage despite one's fears. The goal of both talks was to help students ask themselves important questions like, "What effects do my actions have on my school, my classroom, my friends, and myself?"

Ellis and Southland students will have the opportunity to reflect on the retreat by completing a journal and other follow up activities. Parents interested in checking out and reinforcing what their 8th grade student experienced that day and how it relates to creating a more inclusive school environment are encouraged to watch the parent follow up video at www.youthfrontiers.org/courageparentvideo/

Follow up surveys from the Courage retreat show that students feel this retreat is a valuable experience in a number of ways. Last year, 94% of students correctly identified the definition of everyday courage: to do what is right by following your heart, and not the crowd. As one student stated in their post-evaluation, "I really believe that my act of courage is important and that I can make a difference in someone's life". For further information you may contact any one of the retreat organizers: Thor Bergland at AHS 460-1817, Lea Oelfke or Kirstin Norby at Ellis Middle School at 460-1500.



Large Group Discussion



Activities





Group Leaders

