

# UNITED SOUTH CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tracy Frank, Principal

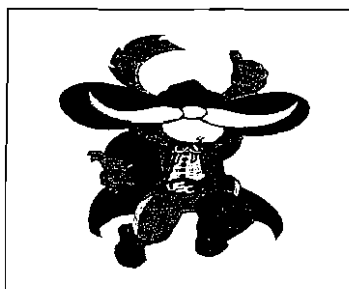
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## USC School District

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As a former sixth grade teacher in the Jackson County Central School District, I experienced the Courage Retreat with my sixth grade students for several years. I was very impressed with what I saw and looked forward to the annual retreat just as much as the students did. Year after year, Youth Frontiers would bring different leaders to each retreat, all quality individuals who brought something new to the table, making each retreat even better than the last. As a middle school principal in a new school district, I knew making the Courage Retreat part of our school year was a must and something I was determined to have my United South Central Middle School students experience.

During the 2004-2005 school year, our staff teamed up with Youth Frontiers to help make our school a better place. Our seventh graders attended the 5-hour courage retreat where they examined their fears and committed to the virtue of courage to help ease their transition into adolescence. The retreat supported all of the values we teach our students here at USCMS. I told the students and staff what to expect from the retreat, but none of them imagined it to be as amazing as it really was. One teacher said, "You told me this would happen and that would happen, but I never really believed it until I saw it first-hand." The bond this retreat helps the students create is unbelievable. Our students walked into those doors as a class made up of several different social groups, some with very little in common. They left as a group of students with a common bond. Their eyes were opened to what others around them might be feeling. They learned how their actions could affect others and change their life and their school to make it a much better place for everyone.

The entire day was filled with fun, laughter, excitement, and most of all the forming of new relationships between classmates. They were allowed to be themselves and talk about their fears and what their hopes and dreams were for themselves and our school. The pebble in the pond activity was very emotional for both students and staff. Students let down their guard and apologized to those they had hurt in the past, and some shared their commitment to courage with the entire group. This day brought our seventh grade students closer than they have ever been before. They left as friends with a commitment of respect for one another and our school.

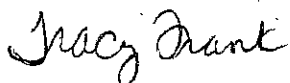
The days that followed at school were quite different. The staff saw positive changes in our students. Our staff received and wore "Courage" buttons to remind the students to always display behaviors they learned from the retreat. One teacher told me she would simply point at her button when she would witness a student saying or doing something disrespectful. The simple point would trigger his/her memory, and he/she would immediately change his/her behavior. The button was a great support for the staff and acted as a constant reminder to the students.

I highly recommend all of Youth Frontiers Retreats. Their vision is to seek to change the way young people treat each other in every hallway, lunch line, and classroom of every public school in America. I can only speak for two schools in Minnesota. However, these two schools are much better places because of Youth Frontier's commitment and dedication to helping build the character of young people in our communities.

The Youth Frontiers staff is wonderful to work with. They are professional, friendly, and very efficient. We were told their expectations of us ahead of time, allowing us enough time to prepare our staff, students, and high school leaders for a successful retreat. The entire day was well organized, and their leaders did not miss a beat. The day flowed from one activity to the next without a moment wasted. The students did not want it to end, and it was all they could talk about over the weeks that followed. The word has now spread throughout our district about the success of our first USC retreat with Youth Frontiers. Everyone is anxiously awaiting our second one this year. As long as I remain the principal at United South Central Middle School, we will do whatever it takes to ensure our students are given the opportunity to experience a Youth Frontier Retreat annually. The experience makes all of us better people.

Thanks, Youth Frontiers, for your dedication to our youth!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracy Frank".

Tracy Frank