OPTING IN

Taking the initiative to enhance membership within a school community

Presented by Thomas Bruffee

Have you ever been part of a group or community and felt as though you were separate somehow? As though you didn't have full membership or value?

The Impetus Behind the Practice

- Feeling apart from our school community

- General lack of understanding of who the students in our programs are and what their talents, skills and visions include

- Lack of understanding of what our program seeks to accomplish with our students

- Staff feeling uncomfortable and experiencing awkward interactions with staff members of other programs with increased frequency
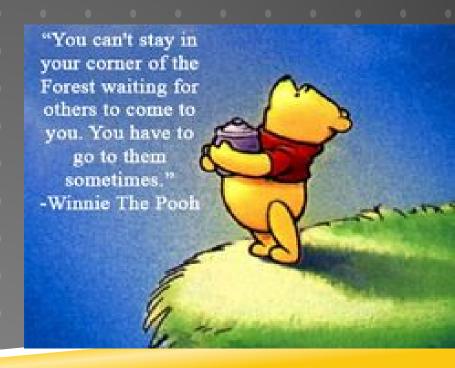
The Goals

- Increase visibility of our students on campus

- Increase opportunities for our students to participate in campus wide events

- Increase others awareness of our program goals

- Afford others the opportunity to come to know our students and understand their personal visions

- Increase and enhance inclusive experiences within our campus school community
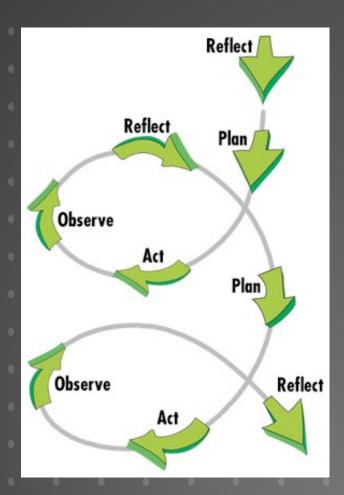
How Could We Accomplish Our Goals?

By
TAKING THE INITIATIVE AND PARTICIPATING "OPTING IN"

"You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."
-Winnie The Pooh

Where Students Participated or Opted In

- Attended an assembly of elementary students performing a skit
- Participated in Spirit Week activities, including PJ day, Sports day, Color day and Superhero day
- Campus pool party
- Leprechaun hunt. Assisted with organizing and leading event for younger students
- Community movie afternoons
- Attended pizza party for transitioning student
- Assisted in preparing for April Open House event
- Resumed eating lunch in the communal cafeteria space

The Process

- Considered the Problem
- Chose to Change
- Collaborated with Colleagues and Students
- Coordinated Activities
- Contributed to the Community
- Reflected on Experiences
- Repeated as Necessary

Active Collaboration Strategies used for "Opting In"

- Attended weekly meetings with all campus school teachers
- Reinstated weekly meetings with my classroom support staff
- Reviewed weekly calendar and considered opportunities for engagement
- Presented opportunities to students weekly and afforded them choice
- Provided staff training on creating Google Sites with students to showcase their talent, dreams and aspirations.
- Worked with students on developing e-portfolios using Google Sites

Strategies used to Reflect Throughout the Process

- Daily Reflection – established the "tiny habit" of brief journal entries at the start and end of each day to prepare for and reflect upon opportunities where we might opt in

- Weekly consideration of scheduled activities for opting in

- Reflective Journaling at end of each week – examined where we opted in throughout the course of the week, and the outcomes and likelihood of future engagement

- Conversations with colleagues within and outside of my program

- Supervisory Conferences with Jeremy (5-Total)

- Progress Updates (8-Total)

We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.

– John Dewey

Growth Experienced

- Increased awareness of the needs of others in my school community
- Increased awareness of the impact of decisions I made for myself and participants in my program
- Increased sense of membership in the campus school community
- More respectful interactions with colleagues
- Observations of students feeling more included
- Stronger sense of leadership
- I see the value of membership in our school community, in spite of the fact that the substantially separate model still doesn't fit with my philosophical position.

Moving Forward
Plans for Future Growth

- Consider the impact of my decisions
- Engage in active collaboration strategies
- Use the cycle of reflection
- Utilize strategies for reflecting upon experiences, making note of how we can build upon positive experiences
- Promote a culture that seeks to know and understand one another from individual and community perspectives
- Complete Google Sites with students and afford opportunities to present
- Seek feedback on sense of community through use of Google survey