

# CARING SCHOOL CLIMATE

Nominees in this category provide a safe school environment where all students feel respected and valued and are empowered to achieve.

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## ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

In the space below, answer the following as completely as possible. Use as much space as needed. Award recipients will be selected based on the answers to these questions.

**1. What are the most significant examples and results of actions being taken to build a safer, more caring school where students feel respected and valued? Be sure to identify the key groups of people (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.) who are performing this intentional work. \***

At Village we place a premium on empathy which is carried out by all members of the community from our administrators to our teachers to our custodian and lunch server to our parents working in the classroom. Additionally our children are given opportunities to lead from the first day of kindergarten. This early lesson of empowerment gives the children all a stake in their community and informs their understanding of their power to contribute to a positive environment. Both of these concepts are interlaced with our Community Vision Statement: We all belong. We are all significant. As we work, learn and play, we come together with compassion and respect for each other. Our Village Values (Model Respect. Make Good Choices. Solve Problems.) stress cooperation and the individuality of every student as we consciously work to maintain and promote a positive school climate

Village School has embraced Project Cornerstone. Our Parent Education team facilitates Project Cornerstone "Take It Personally" (aka TIP) workshops that all parents attend during their time at Village. Several times a year, parents meet in small groups to learn the 41 Developmental Assets identified by the Search Institute and Project Cornerstone as being most influential in helping young people to thrive. Small group exercises and homework assignments bring the concepts to life. The deliberate focus is on developing and maintaining a positive culture for our entire learning community. This class has also been directly responsible for increasing the assets for our community: one mother identified an important asset builder in her life during the class and was inspired to reconnect with that person and now that person is also an asset builder for her children as well. The TIP workshop also helped another parent brainstorm on how to increase asset building at our school and, as a result, we have a new curriculum being introduced this year.

At the beginning of each school year, all of our parents (new and returning) attend Parent Education Classes that are led by trained volunteer parents. The focus of these classes is our Project Cornerstone program, our Positive Discipline program, and our No Bully program. The 3 hour Project Cornerstone class provides a brief review of the 41 developmental assets and focuses on how we implement these assets at Village. This year's refresher class included an exercise where parents listed the ways our school builds assets across all the major categories (Support, Empowerment, Boundaries & Expectations, Constructive Use of

Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies and Positive Identity). Off the top of their heads, parents identified over 50 unique ways assets are supported at our school and each Developmental Asset Category was well represented with multiple examples.

In addition, because each family, each teacher, each administrator and each staff member has the same understanding, goals and intentions, we can reinforce positive messages and strive together to provide a consistent web of support for our students.

At the beginning of each school year, each teacher guides their students in creating Class Agreements (rules of respect they agree to in their class). Each class follows a democratic process to vote on a class name, furthering the sense of classroom community. Each class also designs a class t-shirt based on their class nickname, which students wear on field trips, at our rallies, and at other school events. Every year, PTA funds cover the costs so that each student receives a class shirt which fosters a sense of belonging at our school. At the end of the year, each class name/logo (including all the students' signatures) is immortalized as a decorative tile that is affixed above its respective classroom's window as a permanent reminder to our students that they will always be a part of our school.

Every week teachers engage their students in positive conflict resolution by holding Class Meetings where students compliment each other and mutually problem-solve any issues brought up by the students that need resolution. The class meeting agenda is created by students and the meeting is student-led.

Each month, a different class or grade hosts a school-wide rally. These students work with their parent and teacher sponsor team to facilitate monthly rallies focusing on a positive school climate. For the last two years, the rally themes have come directly from the Project Cornerstone Asset Building Champions (ABC) scope and sequence calendar and provide a common, unifying message to all, while giving our students a leadership experience. For example, here were the rally themes for last year's Champion ABC series:

- September's "Model Respect" rally was tied to ABC book, "Friends to the End for Kids" by Bradley Trevor Greive
- The next rally, "Being Yourself" rally echoed the ABC book, "Giraffes Can't Dance" by Giles Andreae
- November's rally on "Acts of Kindness" showcased the concepts in the ABC book, "BIG" by Colleen Praetore
- The fourth rally, "Feelings / Awareness", reflected the ABC book, "When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry" by Molly Bang
- February's rally on "Accepting Differences" was related to the ABC book, "Through My Eyes" by Ruby Bridges
- "Empathy's" rally was tied to ABC book, "How do I Stand in your Shoes?" by Susan DeBell, Ph.D.
- April's rally was all about "Building Confidence" the way Sebastian did in the ABC book, "Sebastian's Roller Skates" by Joan de Deus Prats
- and the final rally of the year, "Working together / perseverance", followed the message of "Thank You, Mr. Falker" by Patricia Polacco

In addition to the Class Meetings and rallies, another significant example of our systemic application of the Project Cornerstone systems is our Fifth Grade Leadership team of "Expect Respect" students. These students become yard helpers, wearing vests to be identified on the playground at recess, and can help model solving problems. Our "Expect Respect" student teams also visit classrooms to conduct brief peer-to-peer presentations that include student created videos and skits centered on being an up-stander

and facilitating positive student-to-student interactions. In addition to the vests, this year we are planning on adding Project Cornerstone lanyards to the recess uniform that have visual reminders to the students of the ABC books we are reading and tips from the books that can be used as conversation starters between students.

Our teachers design meaningful field trips to enhance the material learned in the classroom. Field trips occur monthly in each class and provide an excellent way for students to engage in learning with hands-on experiences. It encourages curiosity about the world and sparks imaginations about what students might do or be in the future.

Recess is another way we help promote a safe and caring environment. We have approximately 22 parents on campus at any one time. These parents are assigned a specific area for recess and are encouraged by our Principal to follow the Rule of 10 (stay at least 10 feet away from another parent, stay at least 10 feet near a child and interact at least 10 times in a positive way with students at recess). There is no area at our school during recess that is unsupervised and does not have an adult to assess a situation and facilitate, as needed.

The students are always empowered to try to resolve their conflicts first. If a child approaches a yard duty parent about an issue, they are usually asked what they have done first to resolve the issue and if they have tried the “Wheel of Choice”. In the center of our playground, we have a large painted “Wheel of Choice” with 16 options that allow youth to pick from a variety of positive conflict resolution techniques to help them stay in control. The options are shown both in text and in simple illustrations so that even non-readers can use the Wheel and are as follows:

1. Take a seat to cool off
2. Go away, wait, and come back
3. Apologize
4. Use an “I” message
5. Talk to an adult for help
6. Add it to a class meeting agenda
7. Talk it out
8. Count to ten to cool off
9. Ask them to stop
10. Do it tomorrow
11. Ignore it
12. Go back and try again
13. Offer your help
14. Share and take turns
15. Go to another game
16. Walk away

In order to provide both a safe and caring environment for our students, we have implemented the San Francisco based No Bully program at our school. Our Solutions Teams are student peer groups led by Solutions Coaches (trained teachers and staff) that assist students who are having challenges at school. This concept was expanded to include Welcome Teams. New students are interviewed by Solutions

Coaches to learn about them and are then offered help making new friends through assistance from peers. The team of peers is the student's choice.

All of our families and teachers are educated in the No Bully program (both during our Back To School Parent Education Classes and at our Community Meetings) and know how and when to file an Adult Report Form that will trigger the formation of a Solution Team.

For more information on this program and how it has been implemented at Village, please view the following:

- A No Bully video made at our school:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B\\_ZJW-6ywSvMLWlmbDEyZjZtVDg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_ZJW-6ywSvMLWlmbDEyZjZtVDg/view?usp=sharing)
- Our Village Voice article: <http://villagevoice.campbellusd.org/?p=6498>
- The No Bully website: <http://www.nobully.org/>

Another way our school promotes caring is by showing care beyond our school and after the school day ends. This includes: community service field trips, school-wide drives, environmental projects, guest speakers and after school activities. Some recent examples of these events are:

- Our field trip to My New Red Shoes included a school-wide shoe drive (complete with a "shoe-mometer" to show our progress towards our goal) and culminated with the class delivering and sorting new athletic shoes for homeless and low income kids in the Bay Area.
- As an extension to the March ABC book *Stand in My Shoes* by Bob Sornson, one class hosted a food drive to benefit families served by Loaves and Fishes Family Kitchen in San Jose. The mission of Loaves & Fishes Family Kitchen is to provide nutritious meals and support services in a dignified, safe, and caring environment. They offer their services to all needy individuals, with a special concern for families, seniors, and the homeless. Today, they are one of the most respected and well-known safety-net providers in Santa Clara County. In addition, this class had a field trip to volunteer for the Loaves and Fishes Grocery Bag program. As volunteers, they helped sort, package, and distribute grocery bags to low-income families in the community.
- This year, a field trip is planned for Family Giving Tree, which provides toys and gifts for very low income children
- Our school also fully supports the Girls on the Run after-school program. This 10-week program teaches girls life skills such as confidence, how to be a good friend and how to stand up for themselves and others while inspiring them to be joyful, healthy and confident by using a fun, experience-based curriculum that creatively integrates running. Girls on the Run empowers girls to make smart and healthy physical, emotional, and social choices not only as they grow and develop in grades 3-5, but for years to come. Although our school is small in size, in 2015, we had 10 parent volunteer coaches for our after school Girls on the Run program. Not only did we have the most coaches for a school in our area, it also meant that every eligible girl (grades 3-5) could enroll in the program. As a result, we also had the highest level of participation. In 2015, 54 out of 69 girls (or 78% of eligible girls) enrolled in Girls on the Run at our school.
- This year, we will be screening the documentary, "The Mask You Live In", which explores ways for boys to stay true to themselves within the social definitions of masculinity. We are also planning to implement the curriculum that comes with this movie.
- School-wide drives include: Pennies for Patients (benefitting The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society), Jump for Heart (benefitting the American Heart Association), Toy drive (benefitting the Child Advocates of Silicon Valley), food drive (benefitting Second Harvest)
- As an extension of our ABC book, *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges, we had a guest speaker (Grandma Toni) visit classrooms and share her family's experiences with civil rights. The 4th and

5th grades were visited by the Honorable Judge Shelyna Brown from the Santa Clara County Superior Court who also echoed the importance of tolerance, inclusion and having representation and a voice in all levels of government and authority.

- Our care for the earth is expressed via our school gardens, Centers and recent environmental projects have included:
  - the Water Project: in conjunction with Montalvo and the West Valley Clean Water Program, our second graders studied different aspects of water and the importance of water in their lives. <http://villagevoice.campbellusd.org/?p=10219>
  - Cool the Earth: promoting awareness of climate change and motivating taking simple, measurable actions to conserve energy
  - Reduce, Reuse & Recycle: Learning how to reduce the environmental impact of everyday activities. Applications have included: reusing everyday “waste” to create a boat for a science project, an entire Center devoted to EcoArt and reusing waste for prototyping materials for the Design Thinking Center.
  - Penguin and sea otter adoption programs to raise awareness of threatened species. <http://villagevoice.campbellusd.org/?p=10050>

We are very proud of our “Lunch League” program, founded on the Project Cornerstone “Fun-Visors” program. Parents organize and facilitate, for use during lunch, a Game Room, soccer games, a Running Club, a Take-Apart Room, Craft Club, Yarn Club and Gardening activities for any and all students to participate in. These consistent activities, facilitated by active, engaged and positive parents, ensure there are appropriate opportunities for all students to engage and refresh during recess in the way that feels best to them. Students partake in new activities, learn new skills, and emulate their adult role models as everybody works together to foster a gentle, kind and positive learning community.

Our Buddy-Reading program pairs upper grade students with lower grade students for one-on-one partner reading once a week for 30 minutes. These cross grade level activities give the older students a chance to be role models and give the younger students an older buddy to learn from and facilitate cross classroom community building which results in a safer, more caring environment for all. This also encourages reading for pleasure as the buddies are able to select which books to read together.

Along with weekly Art, Music and PE classes, students participate once a week in our Centers program (similar to “electives”). Students from multiple classes are combined in small size multi-age groups (K-2 and 3-5) and they have the chance to experience a wide range of activities such as photography, cooking, woodworking, drama, Lego engineering and so on. These activities are parent run, providing a great opportunity for parents to share their skills and students to interact with additional positive role models in a fun, engaging, learning environment, while learning with students of multiple grade levels.

Once a month, at lunchtime, we have Monday Mixers. Monday Mixers were initiated at our school by one of our teachers and are part of a national campaign launched by Teaching Tolerance over a decade ago. This program “encourages students to identify, question and cross social boundaries. In our surveys, students have identified the cafeteria as the place where divisions are most clearly drawn. So [...] we ask students to move out of their comfort zones and connect with someone new over lunch. It’s a simple act with profound implications. Studies have shown that interactions across group lines can help reduce prejudice. When students interact with those who are different from them, biases and misperceptions can fall away.” This is yet another way to promote a safe and caring environment for our students and foster positive cultural

competencies and identities. This year, as yet another way to encourage and grow leadership skills, the 5th grade Cornerstone Kids will be taking the lead role for the Monday Mixers.

At Village, Fuzzy Grams are a key concept from one of the foundation Project Cornerstone books ("Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" By Carol McCloud) they are a part of our daily fabric. Parents are encouraged to "fill a bucket" by writing fuzzy grams to students, parents, and staff and students often write fuzzy grams to each other and to parents, teachers and staff. Copies of Fuzzy Grams are easily accessible in every classroom as well as the Parent Workroom and are also available to download on our school website. Fuzzy Grams are delivered from one class to another via our Mail Room Center postal system.

In addition, our teachers promote bucket filling in other creative and engaging ways. Last year, one of our fourth grade classes celebrated the 100th Day of School by each student committing to perform 100 acts of kindness by Valentine's Day. The following month, our teachers led a school-wide Color Our World with Kindness event.

Bucket filling is such a part of our everyday vocabulary that it comes out in many situations. A recent homework assignment asked students to define what a good friend was and one student answered, "A good friend is someone who is helpful, an upstander, fills your bucket and helps you not bite the hook." Which just shows you what an impact the Project Cornerstone ABC program is having on our kids.

Each family in every class is asked to participate in a rotational community snack for their class. The Center for Science in the Public Interest has concluded that snacks promote good nutrition as well as lifelong healthful habits. Snacks are especially crucial for children because they are still growing, and healthful snacking at school can lead to better nutrition during foundational years and increased energy and ability to focus. In addition, there are many benefits to family style eating including developing social, language, communication, and self-help skills in a small group setting. The snack guidelines are developed for each class to ensure a caring and safe environment that accommodates allergies and other family food choices.

In addition to the standard district programs, we also promote healthy habits and choices via farmer's market visits to our school, family bike night, Walk & Roll to school programs, Jump for Heart, health fairs and by allowing every student to partake in the lunchtime salad bar, free of cost. Our PTA also funds emergency packs with a three-day food and water ration for every student in case of an extended emergency situation at school. There are also field trip and emergency backpacks, and an in-class emergency bin (containing a collection toilet, various safety equipment, bandages, and first aid instruction).

Each year, our entire first graders engage in a special cooking series in addition to their Centers. The cooking lesson is teacher-led / parent assisted. It is hands-on and includes stories, music, dance, nutrition, math and more so that students learn not just about food, but also about character, social skills and teamwork. Each lesson is tied to the themes of our Project Cornerstone ABC program. For example, last year, our cooking series classes and themes were tied to the Champion year themes and books we were reading in our ABC sessions:

- "Friendship Taco Salad" was about how to be a good friend (ABC book, "Friends to the End for Kids" by Bradley Trevor Greive)
- "Unique Hand Rolls" was about enjoying our individual qualities (ABC book, "Giraffes Can't Dance" by Giles Andreae)
- "Journey Fruit Sticks" celebrated overcoming obstacles and reaching our goals (ABC book, "BIG" by Colleen Praetore)

- "Sweet Potato Pretzels" talked about managing our emotions (ABC book, "When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry" by Molly Bang)
- "Black Eyed Peas" paid homage to tolerance and acceptance (ABC book, "Through My Eyes" by Ruby Bridges)
- The "Raviolis" lesson talked about discovering what is inside each other (ABC book, "How do I Stand in your Shoes?" by Susan DeBell, Ph.D.)
- And, finally, "Fresh Summer Rolls", were all about what we like about ourselves (ABC book, "Sebastian's Roller Skates" by Joan de Deu Prats)

In addition, the Cooking with Character teacher brings one of the lessons to each class in the entire school so each child can have the experience every year.

We know that students who struggle academically can begin to feel disenfranchised. Our school promotes respect for each person as an individual. Our teachers and staff use many tools to identify students in need of additional interventions. Parents, either working with small groups during their classroom shift, or fulfilling their school job as volunteer tutors, support teachers in helping our students achieve academic goals. This helps students to feel more secure in the community and less like an outsider. As one fourth grader said, "Just as some people wear glasses, some kids need extra help. Kids at Village School get help from the parents and other adults around school."

Another group of students was asked to create a story about a girl who becomes an astronaut. They all contributed and, in the end, the result was a story about a girl who was dyslexic and had a hard time reading but was really smart. It was her hard work and determination that got her to become a famous astronaut.

This attitude helps all children feel comfortable and proud of his or her identities, whatever they may be.

Social Events round out the community experience at Village School, helping our students, and their families, become a part of the larger community. Over the summer, the Village School community meets for park days. This helps children maintain their ties to the school, while helping new students and their parents enter the community. In the fall, when children come to school for the first day, they already have familiar smiling faces that greet them at the gate. Each family is assigned a parent partner, who is a continuing member of the school community. This parent is available during the summer to alleviate concerns, answer questions, and provide a network for how to access information and maneuver the systems of the school. Beginning with our Back to School Picnic, families attend numerous events, including our all school campout on a weekend in early fall, the Halloween Carnival, holiday giving celebrations, the Egg Drop, Fun Run and End of the Year Picnic. These opportunities support the crucial link between home and school while developing a sense of community.

Monthly Community Meetings provide parents the opportunity to meet with the Principal and PTA leadership in the evening, without students present. Recent topics have included the move to Common Core, results of school surveys and district reports, fundraising efforts, positive discipline exercises, and other topics of interest to the community, all while building lasting relationships

At Village School, we celebrate the process, not the product of learning. Student effort and success is validated through descriptive feedback, conferencing times, sharing opportunities, student-led classroom meetings, and publishing parties, where children can demonstrate their knowledge through project based learning. The climate at Village School is warm, positive, safe and inclusive, embracing the families and staff in our collaborative efforts to support all children on their road to lifelong learning

By the time a family graduates from our school, they will have completed, on average:

- 7 school maintenance days
- 27 hours of event support
- 27 field trips and driven countless number of miles
- 34 community meetings
- 19 parent education classes
- 74 class snacks
- 1,080 hours of support in the classroom

during which time, each family has created “thousands of moments in the life of a child when they feel valued, respected and known”

## **2. What sets this school apart from other schools doing similar work to create safe school environments where all students feel respected and valued? \***

The proof is in the pudding, they say and that is what sets Village apart. In 2014, Village School was awarded the California Distinguished School Award. This award is given by the California State Board of Education to public schools within the state that best represent exemplary and quality educational programs. And it is no wonder as Village’s application was based on our school’s signature practices: Centers and Positive School Climate.

In 2013, we were also recognized for our Monday Mixers as a Mix It Up Model School by the Teaching Tolerance program. This award recognizes schools that embrace respect and inclusiveness as core values—they “mix it up” all year long.

Having a positive school climate is so important to our school that we created a new PTA board position to reflect our values. In 2014, we created the Positive School Climate Chair (PSC Chair) to have a voice and vote on the PTA board and to represent the various teams that directly support our Positive School Climate. The following teams of parent volunteers now report directly to the PSC Chair: ABC Readers, Parent Education Committee, Cornerstone Kids and Community Service program. The PSC Chair also attends a Positive School Climate meeting once per month with our school Principal, school Secretary and two of our teachers to discuss all of our PSC programs at Village.

The 41 Developmental Assets are well represented in our caring school climate. The results of all of this work is demonstrated in many ways including high student academic achievement, extremely low office discipline referrals and consistently high attendance rates for staff, parents and students – all admirable outcomes. But our most tangible sign of success is the experience on our campus and the graduates we produce.

Step inside our campus and you will experience engaged, and supportive students taking responsibility for their learning and for their environment. You will see students helping each other in class, feeling accepted, honing their public speaking skills as they present information to and encourage each other. You will see that they understand and accept that everyone is at a different level. You will see them at recess reminding other students of the playground rules, helping to dispense equipment from the ballroom, picking up trash around campus because they want to.



You will feel the confidence of students who have been accepted for who they are and who have had a chance to voice their opinion and to help write the rules. You will see the experience they've gained by interacting with students of multiple grade levels and adults of many different skills and backgrounds. You will see them championing fundraisers and other causes they've decided upon themselves, because they know they are in a supportive and caring environment where anything is possible.

You will notice that they have character. They know how to be a bucket-filler. They reach out. They engage. This is because they have been cared for and respect themselves.

You will see administrators, teachers and parents providing tools, serving as positive role models, and guiding them gently, creating the safe, caring environment they need to become the best version of themselves.

And, if you can't visit in person, then you will find in depth articles and interviews of all of the programs mentioned here and more on our Village Voice site: <http://villagevoice.campbellusd.org/>

In the end, it is all about the children and the families so it is appropriate, in closing, to share one family's story that really shows the special community we call "Village School":

"My oldest daughter Olivia is a 7th grader and Village alum. The 2 most significant skills that she learned during her Village School years are to celebrate her uniqueness and to advocate for herself. Olivia was born with a shorter leg and while she started kindergarten with only scars from surgeries, by 2nd grade she needed a 1.0cm shoe lift and by 5th grade the shoe lift had grown to 4.0cm. However, she never felt self-conscious about her differences because she was never teased for them. At the beginning of each school year, she was proud to share her story with her class, answer their questions, feel their acceptance of her and then move on to other more important things than her leg. I am especially grateful for this because a child we met from St Louis refused to wear her shoe lift due to the bullying and this caused her further medical problems.

Despite Olivia's physical differences, she also sought other ways to be unique. In 4th grade, she choose to play the accordion and a large part of that decision was because no one else played it. Six weeks after her first accordion lesson, she saw a 1st grade teacher had brought an accordion to show her class but no one knew how to play it. Olivia was excited to explain the different parts of the accordion and demonstrated how to play it to the entire 1st grade class. She also played solo in front of the entire school in the talent show in 4th & 5th grade. She is proud to remember when she played "Pop goes the weasel" and the entire school spontaneously jumped at the "pop".

The Village community of caring adults, both teachers and parents, gave Olivia the confidence to be able to question other adults and advocate for herself medically. In Olivia's latest surgery in 6th grade, she was fully engaged in her own care and required complete understanding of the how and why for everything that was done to her - from the IV insertion to incision care to the physical therapy.

In Olivia's 6 years at Village, she went from a shy, quiet kindergartener to a self-confident, out-going pre-teen.

Not only did Village School give Olivia important skills to navigate her differences and medical challenges, but the community also supported my younger son and daughter while we were pre-occupied with Olivia's

medical care last year. Despite both of them having multiple teachers due to maternity leaves and being in the care of grandparents at home for more than 3 months, they flourished academically and socially. It was invaluable to me to know that my younger kids were thriving so I could focus on Olivia's needs at that time. I am grateful for Village School's community that has supported my family, helped my kids develop into caring, confident individuals and made me a better parent."