



Park Village Elementary School

JUDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

5855 Midcrown • San Antonio, TX 78218

Phone: 210-653-1822 • Fax: 210-590-4302

BRAULIA CARRILLO
Principal

JOHN MONOSMITH
Vice Principal

Dear Dr. Edwin "Eli" Whitney MD,

I would like to thank you and Slam Dunk for Life for the field trip program for our kindergarten students last summer and for the first grade classroom visit last winter. I have been truly amazed at the change in both groups of students with respect to their interest in obtaining higher education and interest in avoiding the pitfalls that have plagued many of their family members. I would like to give you a 1 year follow-up of the first grade class (who are now in second grade) and a 6 month follow-up for the kindergarten class (who are now in first grade).

With respect to the first grade class you motivated last winter with your talk on how to succeed in life, we are still seeing an improvement in their desire to obtain higher education. As you know, 87% of the children in their class and in the entire school qualify for free breakfast and lunch and over 50% are from single mothers on welfare. Historically, I have never heard any of these children articulate a desire to attend college or discuss a reasonable plan to attend college (despite the fact that I have been telling these children almost daily for years about the value of a college education). After your single visit, about half of these children are talking about going to college. This is a major improvement. I don't know whether or not you remember little C.D. (privacy), the young African American who was not paying any attention to you until you singled him out. When you told him that he would become the richest man in the world if he studied hard, got into medical school and discovered the cure for arthritis, he changed into a different person. C.D. is now a model student. He is doing his homework every day and brings it to me to see every morning even though he is in second grade (I was his first grade teacher). He is still telling me and everyone else that he is going to medical school and discover the cure for arthritis. Prior to your coming to our school, he was a disinterested and terrible student. Many of the other students still come up to me and talk about the success lessons that they heard from you. They also want to see if you have any new pictures from your safari in Africa.

The major success, however, is clearly the field trip program. Last summer, Shamu's trainer at SeaWorld hit a home run with the students. The comparison between her job and the janitor's job was powerful. She has much more fun as Shamu's trainer and makes about 5 times more per hour than the janitor. When she talked about her dream of having this job, the necessity of studying every day, graduating from college, staying away from drugs and alcohol and avoiding pregnancy, she motivated these children more than anything I have ever seen. I hope she will speak to my current class this year.

The follow-up program at Randolph Air Force Base complemented the SeaWorld field trip. The comparison between the Air Force security team that works with the guard dogs and the janitor was equally as powerful. I don't think any of these children knew that a person has to be a college graduate if they want to have many of these important jobs. I don't think they knew how drugs and alcohol would make it virtually impossible to have security clearance needed for this job. I don't think any of them realized how much more money an officer makes than a janitor although they all know how much more fun it would be to be to work and train security dogs rather than be a janitor. They were also amazed to find out how much the military supports higher education.

The icing on the cake was the trip to the robotics lab at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). The consistency between the professors' talk and all the two previous field trips was perfect. You and your staff did an excellent job of preparing the speakers. The message that the fun jobs pay more money, but one has to obtain higher education and have good behavior (no

drugs, no alcohol, no pregnancy etc) to get the fun jobs rang-out loud and clear. I have been talking to these children for years about going to college. They never listened to me or a least they never talked about going.

UTSA has a beautiful campus. It is full of happy and handsome young men and women. Everyone seemed to have a smile on their face. The experiments and demonstrations in the robotics lab captivated them. Speaking with the students made them realize that higher education is not drudgery. My students were surprised to see that there were even high school students working in the lab, earning college credit because of their hard work and good behaviors. They now realized that college not only can give them more money and a job that is more fun, but it is in and of itself a wonderful experience.

Historically, only half of the children in my class room do their first grade homework on a regular basis. In my class, it is now virtually 100%. Do you know how much more fun it is for me to teach these motivated children than before? Historically, none of my children ever articulated a desire to go to college. In my class, it is now virtually 100%! Historically, virtually none of my children had a reasonable plan on how to pay for college. Probably 50% of my children plans on going into the military to get the money for college, the other half are hoping to get scholarships for academic excellence (and they are really working on it).

The most amazing thing to me is the relative disdain these children have for the inappropriate behavior of their family members. Historically, the students would state something to the effect of "my father got put into jail". Now I am hearing statements like "I can't believe my uncle Louie got busted for drugs. He's never going to get a good job. I am not going to make his mistakes." "I can't believe my cousin Yolanda got pregnant. She is only 12 years old. How is she going to get a good education and a good job? She's is going to be miserable. I am definitely not going to make her mistake."

Dr. Whitney, I never realized that when I told the children about college I was effectively speaking Greek. None of my students or any of their family members has ever gone to college. How could they know what a wonderful experience it is to go to college? The trip to UTSA put everything into perspective. I never realized, how much more effective it is to expose these children to successful happy people and hear their story of how they made it. One hour with Shamu's trainer was more effective than 1 year with me in the class room. I have been teaching inner city schools for 27 years. This is absolutely the best thing I have ever seen or heard about to motivate these children. I am so glad that you and I have worked together to put this program together. Would you please come back and speak to my children again and provide this field trip program for the rest of the first grade students? Would you please consider speaking with my principal and fellow teachers about the possibility of doing this for our entire school every year? We really need it.

Thanks again,

Pattie Mathis

Mrs. Pattie Mathis
 First grade teacher
 Park Village Elementary School
 Judson ISD