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Peer Mediation is Elementary

FORT WORTH, Texas – Dealing with the problems of their peers is not something most people would assume elementary students would enjoy doing, but the peer mediators of Crowley Independent School District like it so much that a group of them gave up a recent Friday afternoon to attend a mediation clinic with Texas Wesleyan University School of Law students.

On Jan. 16, more than 25 elementary students representing six schools from Crowley ISD arrived at the law school to hear from professors, a judge and participate in a mediation clinic with current Texas Wesleyan law students. When asked why they wanted to be peer mediators, each student mentioned helping others solve their problems.

“[Peer mediation] plays a big role in school,” Joseph, age 10, said. “I’ve always liked helping people. I’m hoping to learn how to help two people who won’t agree on something, to agree with each other.”

Among the law school and Crowley ISD representatives present for the event was Crowley ISD Superintendent Greg Gibson.

“I am extremely proud of this program and this partnership,” Gibson said. “I am also extremely proud of each one of you,” he told the students. “It is a Friday afternoon. You could be anywhere, but you chose to be here.”

The mediation training was part of an exclusive partnership between Texas Wesleyan University School of Law and Crowley ISD. The idea of merging the two groups developed after Chris Riddick, Crowley ISD Ombudsman, took a course in mediation from Texas Wesleyan School of Law Adjunct Professor Kay Elliott, who teaches a mediation clinic for law students.

Riddick said the experience enhances what the students have previously learned in their own mediation and collaborative problem-solving skills lessons. He said one of the biggest impacts comes from the exposure to new elements of the world around them.

“The early exposure is great,” Riddick said. “This [experience] exposes our young people to another world. It creates opportunities.”

That “world” includes everything from higher education to judges to professors. Riddick said that these things are new to many of the students, and that seeing them early on helps them start thinking about their own futures and what they can do later in life.

Over the last year, Crowley ISD has trained more than 100 students in peer mediation. These students have learned the same collaborative problem-solving skills that the law students at Texas Wesleyan University School of Law are learning.

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