

Middle School Retreat Contributes To Brain-Friendly Environment At Independent Day School-Corbett Campus

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Sixth, seventh and eighth graders at Independent Day School - Corbett Campus (IDS-CC) are typical middle schoolers who spend their morning break chatting about friends, sports, or other things that concern most young people.

However, ask any one of them to discuss their recent middle school retreat, and interspersed with the light-hearted banter are words and concepts not so typically associated with 11 to 14-year olds. "Brain-friendly." "Dignity and respect." "Living above the line."

"In a safe and nurturing environment, everyone learns better."

"We want to be a brain-friendly school."

"Living above the line means treating others with dignity and respect."

"It means learning to trust others."

"Treating others the way you want to be treated."

At the beginning of every school year, the middle school teachers at IDS-CC conduct what has now become a school tradition, an on-campus retreat. It takes place over two mornings, and is led by training expert Dr. Joyce Burick Swarzman, IDS headmaster.

This year, armed with management training videos, the latest news articles about brain-based instruction, flip charts, and, of course, drinks and snacks, students were organized into small groups at long tables intermingling all grade levels. The goal was to give everyone an opportunity to meet students in other grades and encourage team building.

If it sounds like a scenario from the business world, you're right. "Dr. Swarzman conducts these retreats exactly the way she does training for adults," said Betty George, middle school division leader. "Doing so sets a high level of expectation for the students. Treating them with dignity and respect also means we can request it in return."

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This year, the retreat began with a review of the IDS vision as teachers shared their personal interpretations. Students then spent time reflecting and journaling about the meaning of the vision to them.

“Our vision at IDS is, “To accelerate learning by creating a brain-friendly environment that is joyful and challenging, stimulating and productive, and nurturing with high standards and expectations,”” said George. “Students have an important role in making this a reality. So it’s critical they understand what it means, and why our focus is on being brain-friendly. If they understand it, then they can live it.”

The final activity of the retreat centered on a powerful article based on state-of-the-art research about the roles motion and emotion play in learning. “We wanted to show students that what we do at IDS is based on research,” said George. With their teachers’ guidance, students began to understand leading edge concepts regarding learning and brain-based instruction. They then communicated their unique and practical interpretations of these ideas through group posters.

“Happiness inspires learning.”

“Safety in the classroom ensures learning.”

“When someone says mean things, the brain shuts down.”

“The value of a retreat like this is immeasurable,” said Fred Mahusay, technology teacher. “By being given an opportunity to shine as individuals and as part of a team, students were engaged and involved. It was an empowering experience that can affect how they learn well beyond their years at IDS.”

Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, independent school located in northwest Hillsborough County. It serves 500 plus students in grades Pre-K through 8. At IDS, all children experience learning in a nurturing and highly academic environment focused on excellence and developing a positive self-concept. IDS-CC has become recognized as an exemplary school with over 900 visitors observing and learning from and with IDS-CC teachers. For more information about IDS visit <http://www.idsyes.com>.

**Contact: Betty George, Middle School Division Leader,
Independent Day School - Corbett Campus - Telephone: (813) 961-3087**