

Building Community Sets Stage For Learning In Primary Grades

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What's in a name?

Any primary student or teacher at Independent Day School-Corbett Campus would answer, "Plenty!"

Take the name each grade has created for itself. If you're in PreK-3, you're part of the "Flower Patch." PreK-4 students are "Beach Buddies." There's the "Funtastic Kindergarten Frogs." And if you're in first or second grade, or in a multiage class, you're either a "Top Banana," "Cool Cat," or a "Brilliant Bug."

Fun? Yup. Silly? You bet. Especially when first and second grade teachers Fran Ehrlich and Kristine Looker don their banana costumes to greet students on the first day of school—a class tradition. Or when multiage teachers Debi Brockmeyer and Jaelyn Kanarish put on pointy cat ears or kindergarten teachers Jean Harrison, Roberta Lipschutz and Jessica Moore sport colorful aprons dotted with friendly-looking frogs.

It's a typical IDS approach to learning: make the classroom environment fun for students to keep them engaged and on task. Yet there is always a rationale for every action teachers take. It is founded upon brain-based research on how children learn and is directly tied to increasing student achievement and success.

According to longtime teacher of the Top Bananas, Fran Ehrlich, the name is an "affirmation" that each student is special and valued. It also provides a framework for classroom expectations, standards and behavior. "For example," she says, "Students in my class know that a Top Banana is an 'I can-er'— a student who always goes above and beyond to do his or her best. Being a Top Banana gives students goals plus guidelines for achieving those goals."

In PreK-4, teacher Michelle Robson says that being a "Beach Buddy" gives students a concrete way to understand concepts that could otherwise be somewhat abstract for such young children. "Throughout the first week or so of school, we give students many items to decorate their own paper cut-out of a beach buddy," she explains. "A conch shell necklace helps them understand how they should listen and allow others to listen in the classroom. A bucket and shovel symbolize working together. A life preserver reminds them that teachers want them to make safe choices."

Upper Primary Division Leader Debi Brockmeyer says, "Having a class name gives students a sense of family and of community. It provides them with a sense of belonging and builds self-esteem. And when there is a feeling of community, then students are more willing to trust each other, cooperate and share ideas. Then the stage is set for learning and for student success."

Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, independent school located on Orange Grove Drive in northwest Hillsborough County with 550 students from Pre-K3 through 8th grade. 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 2,500 visitors observing and learning from and with IDS-CC teachers. For more information about IDS visit www.idsyves.com.

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