

CASE STUDY

WESTLAKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Peace Learning Center Case Study – Westlake Elementary School

During the winter of 2014, Peace Learning Center facilitators worked with the principal at Westlake Elementary School in the MSD of Wayne Township in Indianapolis, Indiana to create a series of five one hour professional development workshops for all teachers and staff members at the school. The workshop series was developed based on a referral from MSD of Wayne Township’s Superintendent Jeff Butts and per the request of Westlake’s Principal Dennisha Murff to help the school become an even better place for its students. Principal Murff said, ***“The only way we’ll improve our school is if all of us work together.”***

More than 60 teachers, staff members, and administrators attended each of the one hour workshops. Key subject matter included:

- Perceptions and assumptions we make (many of which are frequently wrong)
- The remarkable diversity of your team (both “face” diversity and content diversity)
- Dialogue opportunities – how it feels to be part of a group (or not part of a group)
- Conflict styles
- Problem solving – real world workplace scenarios

The course succeeded beyond our expectations. When asked what they planned to do with what they learned, participants responded as follows:

- Make a Peace Learning board where others can post positive messages
- I want to keep in mind that everyone has struggles and their own perspective and that’s great! We all contribute something different.
- Listen more, think more about how something might be offensive
- Listen more carefully to others. Also I will ask questions if I am uncertain about cultural norms or values.
- Communicate more effectively with team and General Education teachers
- Collaborate more with the teachers I work with
- Teach students that assumptions are the root of “ism”
- Pay more attention to the traits I have learned about my co-workers and be cognizant of them in meetings.
- Communicate –Communicate in a timely fashion-Apply different conflict styles to different people within the situation
- I learned to deal with situations that I perceive as a potential conflict right away. This is already allowing me to interact with my co-workers openly and effectively. I feel less stress and less focused on my responses and far more freedom to enjoy our students and co-workers.

Principal Murff shared specific instances in which the workshops have already made a big impact in her school and she has recommended the professional development series to many other schools in her district. During the last session, the teachers proposed creating a new “Encouragement Zone” policy as a way to remind each other gently to remain positive when talking about their students.

We were impressed with the staff at Westlake Elementary for their high level of participation, difficult discussions, and willingness to create a safe environment for dialogue. The workshop series can best be summarized by the words of a participating teacher who said, ***“Nobody in here is ‘less than’.”***