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## School district starts a 'caring' initiative

Megan Tackett Nov 25, 2018



Coach Frenchey McCrea, a teacher participant with Del Rio Cares, encourages students to implement good character in all aspects of life, from football, to the classroom and at home.

Students, teachers and school administrators are striving to make Del Rio a better place by implementing a district-wide initiative that encourages kind behavior.

San Felipe Del Rio CISD administration developed Del Rio Cares to promote a more compassionate, empathetic and responsible student culture after the deadly May shooting at Santa Fe High School.

Tracy Wayne Richardson, BCFS Health and Human Services family advocate and Del Rio Cares coordinator, described during a recent school board meeting how the shooting personally affected him.

"This was very personal to me because I graduated from Santa Fe High School and I still have family and relatives, friends in that community," Richardson said.

Districts administration, principals and coaches teamed up with BCFS, to discuss what could be done on a local level to prevent a similar tragedy from happening in Del Rio, Richardson said, and from that meeting, came Del Rio Cares.

"CARES" serves as an acronym for the initiative's mission, Richardson said: caring and connection, awareness of the needs of others, recognizing and reporting any risk factors, engaging everyone and supporting each other.

"Give the students the support they need, the resources they need, so they can in turn help each other and they can be encouraging motivators even in themselves," Richardson said.

District principals were asked to select teachers they felt would be the greatest influence on students, Richardson said.

"I was able to step in on Coach Frenchey McCrea's session one day. He had the guys out on the field and he was going at them about character, and talking to them about character," Richardson said. "These lessons are being taught and discussed in the athletic department as well as the fine arts."

The teachers then chose "agents of change," students who the teachers felt could have a positive influence on the student body, Richardson said.

Since its implementation, students have spurred their own campus initiatives, like the kindness challenge at San Felipe Memorial Middle School, which encourages random acts of kindness, like giving out high fives or giving a compliment. Students at Blended Academy students also raised enough money to help one of their peers purchase a new pair of shoes, Richardson said.

"I think Del Rio Cares is starting to take off," Richardson said. "And this is a great example of how it's taking place."

Counselors Alda Zuniga, Cindy Welch and Dora Salinas developed a curriculum for Del Rio Cares, 10-minute lessons implemented in homeroom classes between sixth and 12th grade campuses, Richardson said. Each student keeps a Del Rio Cares journal to record each lesson and for review later, he said.

While the initiative is new, Richardson said during the meeting he believes Del Rio Cares will continue to grow and positively impact the district and community.

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Ruben Cantu