



## Principal's program goes into classrooms to allow teachers planning time

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HUDSON -- Children cozy up to the warm light of a campfire, singing songs about bears and frogs led by an entertaining camp director.

But the campfire is inside a Hudson Elementary School art classroom in the middle of the day. And, the leader is Principal Scott Myers.

The goal is to give teachers more time to plan lessons while the principal uses innovation to reinforce good social skills with students.

The "fire" is made of lights and yellow tissue paper; a forest scene is projected on a wall. Myers, garbed for the outdoors and carrying a flashlight, also teaches safety tips for real fires.

"When I became a principal, I vowed not to sit behind my desk waiting for kids to get in trouble before they see me," the long-time principal said. Instead, Myers, who worked at Carlock and Eugene Field elementary schools, promotes mutual respect.

In exchange, teachers get time to plan specifically for individual students, gifted or struggling, and to organize events for all students. If a grade level has two teachers, they work together.

By the end of November, the school's 275 students -- kindergarten through fifth grade -- will have had their first campfires with the principal.

The 40-minute monthly campfire is adjusted by grade level for style and content, but the message is the same.

This month, it's "be kind to each other and don't use bad words." Props and songs help reinforce teachings of an anti-bullying program.

For 16 summers, the principal has had led day camps for State Farm Insurance Cos. Here, as there, he makes funny faces when he leads comical songs.

But it's not all fun and games. There are lessons to be learned.

This time, Myers introduced 45 second-graders to a new student: "Red" is made of red paper and stands about the height of a second grader.

He gave students permission to say "unkind things" to Red; when they did, they ripped a piece off his paper shoulder to show that words hurt. Later, the children apologized, and they taped damaged parts back on Red.

"I think Red feels better," Myers said, but added he is still damaged from hurt feelings. "Think before you say unkind words."

While Myers worked with the children, teachers Becky McGrew and Sharon Abner finished work on a field trip and planned for an upcoming rain forest theme. During the next campfire break, they will focus on literacy projects.

After the campfire, students returned to class and took Red with them, where he sits at a desk to remind students of lessons learned.

"We learned how things can hurt even when you say you are sorry," said Grace McCully, 7, Hudson.