

PACA (Project Adventure Classroom Activities)

Grades 5 - 8
Parent Letter

Dear parents/caregivers:

Taos Charter School is implementing a social emotional learning curriculum based on Project Adventure Experiential Learning activities called PACA (Project Adventure Classroom Activities) in grades 5 - 8. The program will help students develop their thinking skills, learn responsible ways of behaving, develop their emotional intelligence, and improve academic performance. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about this program.

Social Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement

Emotional intelligence is the ability to blend thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions. Research has shown that academic performance and emotional intelligence are strongly related. In one study, students in the highest achievement group also demonstrated greater interpersonal competency, adaptability and stress management than students in the other groups. High social emotional intelligence seems to help students manage the complexities and pressures common among successful students.

Taos Charter School

Taos Charter School has a climate that supports and expects high academic achievement. We also have a relatively stable student population in each class. By 5th grade, preadolescence stresses, academic demands and long term relationships with their peers have begun to take a toll on some of the students resulting in behaviors that impact the social climate of the class as well as academic achievement. These challenges increase as the class progresses through to the 8th grade. Although the majority of our students have a strong foundation in social emotional skills, even these students can become unbalanced and drawn into negative interactions by a few influential peers or by the changing realities of their own maturation process. By proactively developing the group's social and emotional learning, students will be better prepared to cope with the challenges inherent in being a 5th, 6th, 7th or 8th grade student at Taos Charter.

Parent Participation

You are your child's most important model and teacher. The more you understand about the PACA curriculum, the more you will be able to help reinforce and support your child's skill development. Parents are welcome to review the curriculum materials or to participate in any activity. Please encourage your child to tell you about their PACA experiences.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning activities have three components: First, the activity is introduced to the group by giving instructions, framing the task as it might relate to the students' lives and setting goals. Second, the group engages in the activity, problem solving and communicating with each other. Third, through a debriefing discussion, students make connections between the experience and their thoughts, feelings, intentions and behaviors. This is where the learning from the activity

becomes integrated into the on-going functioning of the group. Three basic questions are asked during the debriefing: “**What...?**” (What happened); “**So what?**” (Generalizing what was learned); and “**Now what?**” (Learning is transferred to other situations).

Experiential learning teaches students to manage their own behavior because: 1. It is engaging and fun and students want to participate. 2. It allows students to experience a behavior (positive or not), reflect on that behavior; learn to replicate or diminish the behavior and to transfer the behavior to other settings. 3. It requires students to be responsible to self, community and others.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

By helping students to experience a seemingly isolated event (the activity) and by giving it context (helping them to create meaning from the experience) students are provided with the opportunity to learn, understand, apply and transfer knowledge. The use of an activity as a primary vehicle for the expression of behaviors puts those behaviors in the here and now to be examined and then generalized and applied to other situations.

Sample Activity – Trust Walk

Prior to the activity the group will discuss the guidelines, safety rules and the meaning of trust. The activity consists of pairs of students taking a turn at leading their blindfolded partner around campus for 10 minutes. The debriefing consists of discussing the students’ perceptions of what happened, how what happened relates to who they are and how they can apply what they have learned about themselves to the real world.

Organizational Framework of Learning Outcomes

Be Here (Affiliation)

Components: *presence, participation, connection, fun*

Be Safe (Trust)

Components: *attention, responsibility, commitment, boundaries and relationships*

Commit to Goals (Initiative/Achievement)

Components: *identification, initiative, accessing help and evaluation*

Be Honest (Identity/Individuation)

Components: *assessment, feedback, courage*

Let Go and Move On (Differentiation)

Components: *challenge and risk, acceptance and forgiveness, transition and change*

Care for Self and Others (Personal/Social responsibility)

Components: *balance, self care, serving the larger community*

Curriculum Delivery

PACA will be taught in 45 minute lessons once a week for the first semester and every other week the second semester. Mr. Jones will provide the instruction. If you have any questions about this program, please call Mr. Jones at 751-7222 x 202.