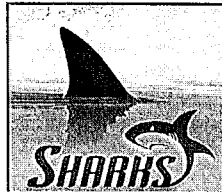


*Horizons Academy School*

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"A school with a safe environment that allows an opportunity for our students, families, and staff to grow academically, socially and emotionally"

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my distinct pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for the Cypress Initiative and their implementation of the SPARK Curriculum. The introduction of the SPARK Curriculum to our staff and students has been critical in helping to cultivate a positive culture on our campus. I am convinced that the positive impact of the SPARK mentors being on our campus will be reflected in our school rating.

I was first introduced to the Three Principles nearly 30 years ago. This is the powerful understanding which provides the foundation upon which the SPARK Curriculum is built. I attribute much of my personal and professional success to the fact that I've internalized the Principles as part of my personal philosophy. This fact has provided me a unique opportunity to be critical of the integrity of the SPARK Curriculum, mentors and even the implementation of the program by the Cypress Initiative. I am pleased that we have realized a great deal of the positive impact that has been our goal.

It is extremely challenging to come into a public school setting and work through restrictions and scheduling limitations to implement any program. Cypress Initiative CEO Brooke Wheeldon-Reece embraced that challenge and worked closely with me to navigate each obstacle with a "can do" attitude. While there were compromises with scheduling and access, we were careful NOT to compromise the delivery of the content to students or staff. The impact has been undeniable.

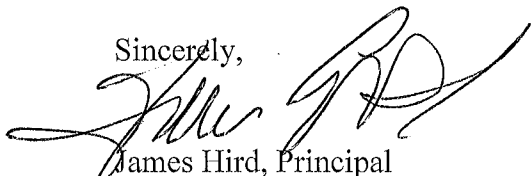
Based on the initial reactions of staff, it appeared that there was a great deal of skepticism and resistance to the idea of learning about the SPARK Curriculum. The strategy was to expose staff to the curriculum by allowing them to observe while SPARK mentors worked with students. While we had to be flexible with the number of staff we could impact at one time, the strategy was very successful. I believe it provided a less threatening way to introduce the concepts to adults. One result is that I have observed in staff a more open attitude with regard to working with students to meet their needs. This is in stark contrast to the prior attitude that I would describe as "compliance focused". We have effectively managed to create a more secure and controlled environment while decreasing the tension between students and staff. Staff has learned that we do not have to control students; instead, we need to relax and teach them that they can control themselves. It has been refreshing to see how staff has transformed from the old power struggle approach to the matter of fact delivery of choices and consequences. This transformation is a direct result of our staff learning to reflect on how the individual's thinking and perspective can influence their experiences.

The students seemed to be able to grasp the concepts and expound upon them during classroom sessions. This was not surprising or unexpected. The more impressive result has been observing the many cases where students volunteer their understanding of some of the concepts that they have learned through the SPARK Curriculum. This has been reported by multiple staff on many occasions. There is no better indication of the impact of the concepts than the fact that students are thinking them and attempting to connect concepts to themselves.

To a person, the Cypress Initiative staff has been a pleasure to work with. They have worked to integrate and become part of the fabric of our campus. They found ways to be resources to students and staff. They were flexible with regard to working with other programs on campus and supporting school wide activities. The SPARK mentors were consistent in their interactions with student and staff, always speaking to the health in each person. They were truly role models of the principles.

The end result of having the Cypress Initiative and the SPARK curriculum has been the ability to build a healthy foundation upon which our school culture and programs could grow. Our school culture has shifted positively. We have been able to reduce our number of behavioral referrals by as much as 60 percent in one month. Our Out of School Suspensions have reduced from nearly 1500 to less than 900, over the course of the school year. We have met our goal of testing at least 90% of our students, qualifying Horizons to receive a school rating of commendable. I am convinced that these positive outcomes would not be possible without the SPARK Curriculum being implemented by the Cypress Initiative on our campus for the past two years. I only regret that Horizons Academy does not have the ability to fund the continued implementation for future years. I am grateful for the impact of the program and give my highest recommendation of the Cypress Initiative.

Sincerely,



James Hird, Principal  
Horizons Academy