



Washoe County School District Spotlight on Student Voice

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Edition 2: Featuring Westergard Elementary School

“We Help Be a Teacher”

–Jayna, 5th Grade

Westergard STUCO (Student Council)

Jayna learned firsthand what it means to have a voice in her school when she wrote Mrs. Weir, her principal, a letter about Student Advisory Council. Jayna received her inspiration from her older sister who was attempting to start a Student Council at a nearby middle school. When she heard her sister talk about the things she hoped to do while serving as a member of Student Council, Jayna reports thinking, “This sounds fun; Westergard should do this too.”

Mrs. Weir received the letter and immediately engaged Jayna in discussion to better understand Jayna’s vision of Student Council. Jayna and Mrs. Weir then worked together to start a new practice, known as STUCO, at Westergard Elementary School.

Currently, the STUCO is comprised of 5th grade students who are invited to apply each spring during their 4th grade year through teachers and peer nominations. The students have worked with Mrs. Weir to choose all the forms including the application. Jayna’s definition of STUCO is “a group of students who help around the school.” STUCO



members give school tours to new students, provide academic peer tutoring to younger students, hand out ‘Paws’ (PBIS tickets) to students demonstrating behavior consistent with school wide expectations, and help with other tasks that come up at the school. When

questioned about what she likes most about being a member of STUCO, Jayna said, “We help be a teacher.” With the added pressure of being a good example, Jayna described how other students look to STUCO members to teach them how to “be good students and do good things for the school.”

STUCO was created with the intention of making school a better place for all students, but Westergard STUCO members don’t stop there. This year, the group rallied up the entire



school to do a book drive for the victims of Hurricane Harvey and they coordinated a food drive to donate to local families during the holiday season.

Westergard also strives to give students a voice in their classrooms. 3rd grade teacher, Mrs. Breshears, gave up ownership of handing out awards in her classroom. Instead, she has the students nominate and vote for students based on fair assessments of their contribution to school climate through modeling of appropriate expectations. While this might be a scary practice to some teachers who worry this will become a “game of popularity,” Mrs. Breshears reports that it hasn’t been a problem as long as she stops to teach key SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) skills like self-awareness and social awareness. When students are aware of their own behaviors, they know whether they are truly the best candidate for an award. By having to pay close attention to their peers’ behaviors, they are learning to be socially aware of others. Mrs. Breshears also feels that

students have an innate desire to praise each other and when you trust them with that opportunity, they rise to the occasion.

Westergard STUCO was one of the first groups of elementary students to attend the 4th Annual Strength in Voices Conference in April, where they were able to share their leadership experiences with other students and renew a commitment to be leaders and serve their school community.

Jayna and her peers confirm that when students know their voice matters, they are more engaged in the educational process! We thank the students and staff for inviting us into their school to witness and share their Student Voice journey.



Are you interested in starting a Student Advisory Council at your school? Do you want to be featured in our newsletter? We’d love to hear from you!

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