

William Paschall Elementary

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“A TEA RECOGNIZED SCHOOL”



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Dear Dr. Edwin “Eli” Whitney, MD

It is difficult to find the right words to express my appreciation to you for funding the field trip for my entire student body and faculty to visit Sea World. THANK YOU! My school services students that come from a high poverty area. Eighty-Six percent of them come from homes that are considered below the poverty line and many of them are from single parent households. Needless to say, the expedition to Sea World was a once in a life time event for many of them. Your vision for providing expeditionary learning with a focus on learning about and understanding the need for advanced education is congruent with the goals Paschall Elementary has for its students. Like you, we know that breaking the cycle of poverty can only be accomplished through education. Our teachers discuss going to college with their students on a regular basis. For many of our students, college doesn't seem like a real possibility or even a need. However, by providing opportunities like the Sea World expedition to learn first hand from people engaged in exciting, fulfilling work is something that needs to be seen and not just talked about in class which is what the staff at Sea World demonstrated for our children.

One particular highlight from the expedition was an interaction I observed with one of the divers in the huge aquarium exhibit. He was underwater answering questions posed by our students. They asked him about his education and the things he had to accomplish in order to work in that capacity. The diver and the docent on the outside of the aquarium engaged in a fun-loving, lively banter about the importance of completing homework, staying in school and taking care of your body. The students learned that they were both Marine Biologists and were responsible for keeping the environment healthy for the animals. Students could clearly see how much fun they had in their work. It was an obvious contrast between the workers outside that were cleaning the park.

When most of our students come to us, their background knowledge of the world around them is a blank slate which was evidenced by what a fifth grader said to me on the bus ride home and I quote, “Mrs. Kelly, I always thought Shamu was something people made up just for TV. I didn't know he was real and here.....in San Antonio.” He was totally amazed and this was from a ten year old boy who, in a more affluent neighborhood, would have been to Sea World already and probably several times. Without a schema for even understanding the possibilities and options for them as adults, we have little hope of ever breaking the poverty cycle. A second grade student shared, “Mrs. Kelly, this is the BEST day of my whole life.” Clearly, students were touched by this experience.

As I read through some of the letters our students wrote to you, it is evident that many of them got the message that education, hard work and living a healthy life style will help them become successful in life. We are beginning to see evidence of students talking about the possibilities of going to college. Student behavior and pride in their work has already improved. Our school attendance rate is the highest it has ever been this year and our discipline referrals are the lowest so far. We are beginning to see evidence of increased interest in Science. We began a Science Club after our visit to Sea World. Initially, we only had thirty members. There has been such a student demand for participation that we will be increasing it to one hundred fourth and fifth graders after Christmas. Even though our parents often lack the funds to provide outside of school learning experiences, they want to see their students succeed and they take great pride in their accomplishments. I have had many parents mention to me how grateful they are for these types of opportunities for their children.

It is my hope and desire to continue a partnership with Motive Our Students Texas and its Gamer Program. Without outside assistance, we can not provide these types of critical opportunities. Exposure is the key. Only by providing background knowledge for children of poverty will we be able to help them truly see the possibilities and help them begin to dream of what they might become. If only one student from Paschall Elementary can have the positive impact on our society that you have had, Dr. Whitney, this program will have

been a success. I have confidence, though, that there will be many students that achieve their goals and will have a positive impact on our society as a result of this program. Thank you again for your vision and the courage it takes to implement that vision for the students of Texas.

Sincerely,

Jayanna Kelly

Jayanna Kelly
Paschall Elementary Principal