

TO: All Participating Middle School Teachers
FROM: Daniel Q. Callister, Chairman
SUBJECT: 2017 “Do the Write Thing Challenge”
DATE: August 2016

Thank you for taking the time to involve your 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in the 2017 **“Do the Write Thing Challenge.”** Starting this fall, you will be joined by thousands of other classroom teachers from across the United States in a coordinated, unique effort to give students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts on the impact of youth violence on their lives and to make personal commitments to reduce violence. Attached to this packet you will find a summary of research conducted by the University of Texas at El Paso documenting the positive impact this program has on relationships between students, parents and teachers. According to a Chicago teacher, *“The Do the Write Thing Challenge Program is responsible for one of the most important things that happened in a classroom during all the years I have been a teacher. After the children had the opportunity to write on the issue of violence, discussion in the classroom became open and extraordinarily emotional. The ultimate result was positive beyond a teacher’s wildest expectations.”*

The School Ambassadors from your school and their parents, teachers and principal will be honored at a recognition ceremony hosted by your local “Do the Write Thing” Committee. The writings of the School Ambassadors will be published and distributed to local policymakers. Finally, National Ambassadors will be selected.

In July of 2017, if your student is selected as a National Ambassador, you will be invited by the National Campaign to Stop Violence to attend the “Do the Write Thing Challenge” National Recognition Week in Washington, D.C. (travel and accommodations included). During previous National Recognition Weeks, “Do the Write Thing” National Ambassadors have met with a United States Supreme Court Justice, the United States Secretary of Education, the Attorney General of the United States, the United States Secretary of the Interior, Members of Congress and other prominent Americans to discuss the problem of youth violence. In addition, the students were honored at an embassy reception hosted by the Ambassador from the State of Kuwait to the United States and the book of their writings was placed in the Library of Congress, ensuring that the student’s words will be available to all. For more information about the National Recognition Week please go to www.dtwt.org.

Enclosed is a packet titled Instructions for Classroom Teachers, which explains this year’s **“Do the Write Thing Challenge”** in more detail. This packet includes information about program rules, entry deadlines, selection criteria, classroom discussion and student recognition. All of this information can also be downloaded at our website, www.dtwt.org. In addition, a video highlighting the National Recognition Week can be viewed. **Note that the deadline for the submission of student writings to the Communities In Schools administration office is Friday, January 27, 2017**

If you have any questions, please call Gloria Taylor, CISCB Executive Director at 361-696-4030 x-1 or Christa Creek, CISCB Director of Programs at 361-696-4030 x-2. Thank you again for participating in this year’s program. We wish your students success and hope to see you and one of your students in Washington, D.C. next July.



Benefits of the “Do the Write Thing” Challenge Program

During National Recognition Week 2014, researchers from the University of Texas at El Paso interviewed the students, parents and teachers who were in attendance. The purpose was to conduct research on how the “Do the Write Thing” Challenge Program affects its participants. Below are some of the outcomes.

Students

- Greater empathy and understanding for victims of violence
- Increased tolerance and less judgmental for differences of people
- Increased communication with peers and family members instead of reverting to violence
- More positive behaviors and attitudes towards peers and teacher
- More motivated to report violence to teachers and encouraged others to do the same
- Standing up for themselves to gain confidence
- More often reporting bullying and similar behaviors to adults and more aware of the importance of doing so
- Reaching out to kids who do not have friends and are often bullied
- Greater motivation to intervene, especially in bullying situations
- Believe they can make a difference
- Awareness that they can do things differently instead of using violent solutions

Parents

- Better understanding of the impact of violence on their children
- Increased communication with sons, daughters and other family members
- Much more aware of child’s concerns
- Improved communication at home with children and spouse
- Greater understanding of violence in the school and community
- Monitoring their children more in their neighborhoods to see what they are doing
- Want to see more schools and students involved in DtWT
- Interested in creating projects to help children with problems related to violence

Teachers

- Increased knowledge about their students leading to 1) attitudinal changes and 2) adapting their instruction
- Established mutually trusted relationships with students
- Awareness of how students became more tolerant, less discriminating and less hostile towards others
- Greater tolerance and compassion for students as a result of discussions and essays
- Change teaching modes including using writing as a preventive measure
- More healing and bonding of families
- More closely monitoring student behavior regarding bullying
- Teaching their students not be by-standers

Research Team: Drs. Josefina V. Tinajero, Professor & DtWT Chair; Sarah Peterson, Associate Professor; Rick Myer, Professor and Craig Williams Association Professor, UT El Paso.