

# Chicken Soup for *Friendswood ISD*

Cereal but with a V. The first day of school was always difficult for me. Was my outfit fly enough to catch the ladies' eye, but still dominate at recess? Did I have any classes with my best friends? These questions took my mind prisoner but the worst part was I dreaded how the teacher was going to butcher my last name. Smith, Johnson, and Williams were never mispronounced. Veariel, however, would stump every teacher, so I would go through my normal monotone response: "It's like cereal, but with a V." Eventually, I got to the point I would try to respond "here" before the teacher could transition from my first name to my last name. Needless to say, it may have only been one day, but the first day was always such a negative experience to start off the first week of school.

As a 6th grade teacher, it can be quite difficult to memorize 470 plus names. It's a yearly goal to know all of my kids' last name by the end of first 9-weeks and, to much success, I usually get really close. Add in the goofy nicknames like Princess P, El-Mo, Mills-ionaire and the always favorite Little-plus-their-last-name because they are the second sibling to come through the gym. Eventually, kids move onto the next grade, a whole new batch comes in and I repeat the process. With all that being said, a 6th grader's first day at the Junior High can be intimidating with the stress of lockers, getting lost learning a five-class schedule, etc. With my own collection of terrible first-day experiences, I try to make as many students' first day of school memorable in a positive way. Need to find a room? Follow me this way. Need help opening your locker? Here's a few tips and tricks to make it easier. Whatever it takes.

I didn't know it, but working the Friendswood summer basketball camps as a FHS player undeniably conditioned me to be where I am now: a mentor for our youth. Attempting to "teach" thirteen 7 to 9-year-olds anything basketball-related is... CHALLENGING! Especially coming off their snack break where they just chugged a Dr. Pepper with skittles that were dumped in it. With zero management strategies, I began to watch and learn from the adults in the gym in how they handled situations. If kids line up correctly for knockout, celebrate it with high fives for everyone. Somebody hits a buzzer-beater in hot shot or lay-up competition, celebrate it like you've never seen it happen before. A kid wins in dribble knockout, you congratulate the winner but, more importantly, you tell the kid who lost how proud you are of their effort.

Being selected as an FHS PAL also furthered my mentor skills. After the initial visit and first few weeks after meeting my kids, I struggled because I thought they would have fun with the activities or equipment I would bring to do. As the year progressed, one of the more important lessons I learned was to pay attention to the conversations during the board game or throwing of the football. I lost often at Uno, Candy Land and Battleship, but would spend more time listening to what my kid had to say versus game strategy.

Creating meaningful connections and building positive relationships with our students is so important these days. My Dad, the original Coach V, is 100% responsible for instilling in me how important these life lessons and values are on a daily basis. How you make others feel will inherently affect how they feel about you. My Dad is the reason why I continue to do the little things like remember a name, celebrate small victories and listen to the stories of all my students. If we want the next generation to turn into successful adults, they need to know we care for them because those connections and relationships are the foundation for successful learning.

-Matt Veariel, FJH Coach