



### COLLIER EDUCATOR GRANT “STAND UP FOR JUSTICE”

Sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Collier County

A monetary grant will be made to the educator whose lesson(s) and/or activity(s) is selected as best meeting the criteria below. The purpose of this grant is to honor Collier County elementary, middle, and high school educators who strive to counter the prevailing tendency within today’s popular culture for students to deride or denigrate others based upon difference. The lesson(s) or activity(s) should have as its major objective the purpose of instilling the positive character trait of “respect for others” in students. All applicants must have created lessons and/or activities of their own design or have successfully made adaptations from other programs and should be able to show evidence of a positive nature as a result of implementation. Successful applicants will be contacted and asked to submit a copy of the lesson(s) or activity(s) from the current school year, a description of its implementation, and evidence of its effectiveness. Applicants may include Collier County elementary, middle, and high school teachers, guidance counselors, school librarians, administrators, psychologists, and media specialists. Students, parents, colleagues, and community members are encouraged to nominate an educator. Self-nominations are also encouraged and accepted.

Applicant’s name: Andrea Polanco

Applicant’s email: polanacan@collierschools.com

Number of years teaching: 23

Grade or subject taught: 7th Grade Civics

School: Oakridge Middle School

School Address: 14975 Collier Blvd Naples, FL 34119

Phone (daytime): 239-377-4890 Phone (evening): 239-537-5665

**On a separate page(s) with the name of the applicant on each page, please briefly:**

- Describe the precipitating events that motivated you to initiate these lessons or activities.
- Describe the lesson(s) or activity(s); and if adapted from another source please reference.
- Explain how the lesson(s) or activity(s) teach students the importance of respecting others no matter what religious, racial, cultural, or other differences exist.
- Explain how it helped them counter bigotry and bullying and prepared them to stand up for justice.

If your application is selected as a finalist, you may be asked to provide evidence/proof of effectiveness such as but not limited to: a questionnaire, interviews, documented anecdotal conversations and/or observations, and etc.

Please complete the following if you have encouraged someone other than yourself to apply:

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email: \_\_\_\_\_

Your address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (daytime): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (evening): \_\_\_\_\_

Your relationship to applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Submit the completed form in writing, by email, or video format no later than **February 15, 2018**, to:

2500 Vanderbilt Beach Road, Suite #2201, Naples, FL 34109

Andrea Polanco  
Oakridge Middle School  
7<sup>th</sup> Civics  
Kindness Rocks Project  
#collierrocks

My project to help spread kindness to our community began after Hurricane IRMA. I had been thinking long and hard how to transition my students back into school and help the community at the same time. During my family's evacuation to NC, my sister introduced my daughter to rock painting. After a little research, I found the Kindness Rock Project where people paint inspirational messages on rocks and place them throughout the community for people to find, giving them a little inspiration throughout the day. What better way to bring Civics to life with students; being an active member in their community.

I presented my idea of the project to my students the day we returned to school and their excitement had me overjoyed. They were coming up with messages to encourage people to "rebuild", "smile", "breathe", and even to "sail through the storm". After the rocks were painted students put a label on the back letting those that find a rock know they are to hide the rock in another location to brighten another individual's day, spreading kindness throughout the community. We have been watching the #collierrocks posts on social media where community members are finding rocks and letting us know that it brightened their day. My students have enjoyed the project so much they have continued the project and are painting rocks after school to keep the project going.

Our project was highlighted in the November issue of Neapolitan Magazine which I believe tells a great deal about our project and how the idea came about. Please see a copy of the article below.

**COLLIER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS** | By Amanda Jackson, Communications & Community Engagement

## Oakridge Middle Students Rock

If a multi-colored rock catches your eye somewhere across town, make sure to pick it up. You've just found a Collier Kindness Rock. Andrea Polanco's seventh grade civics classes at Oakridge Middle School have been creating these rocks of positivity to spread kindness across the community.

Polanco says she was inspired to start the Collier Rocks project while in North Carolina during Hurricane Irma. She was finding painted rocks with inspiring messages left and right. When she started researching her discovery, she realized the rocks were part of a bigger kindness project spreading across the country.

"When we came back to school I told my students, 'I know we've all experienced different things during the storm and I think creating these kindness rocks will be a good way to get our emotions out about the storm but also spread kindness to the community,'" Polanco said.

Over the following days, her classes painted more than 600 rocks to be placed throughout the community. On the back



Since then, other schools and organizations have been getting involved in the project as well, but Polanco's students have no plans to slow down.

"I want to encourage others to spread kindness," said seventh grader Grace Tort. "There are people in the community that don't even have houses anymore. I think that people need a small message of happiness after everything that's happened recently."

She left her first rock at the beach. Now she's working on three others. 'Be Kind,' 'Kindness is like Confetti, Throw It,' and a yin yang painted rock that says 'Life is a Balance of Happiness.'

"I just think it's a fun way to relax, and painting is fun, so not only can I relax but I can also send a great message out to people who need it and need extra encouragement," said seventh grader Brandon Sovajni. "This is important because some people are down and they want to give up, so I think by doing this you can give people a chance to be happier, to keep going and

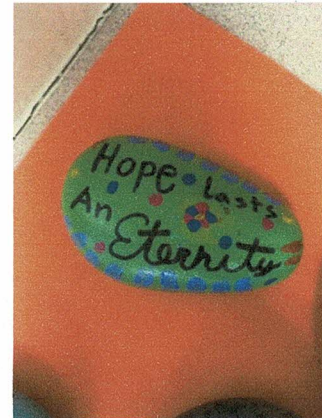
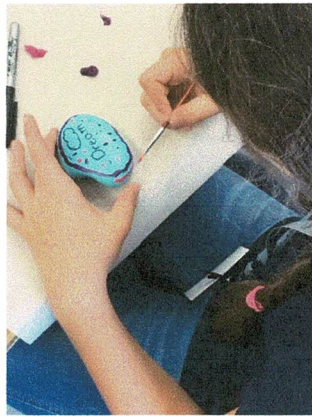
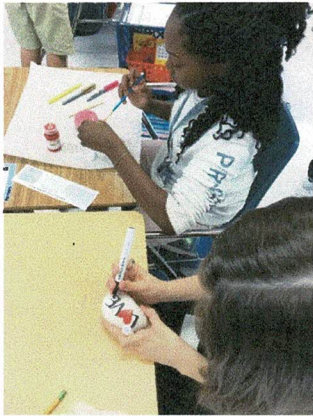
"I explained the hashtag and how people were going to post pictures and hashtag them, but it wasn't until they actually started seeing them on social media that the students really got excited."

While this started as a classroom project, Polanco has been hosting students twice a week to paint more rocks.

"There's so much negativity in the news

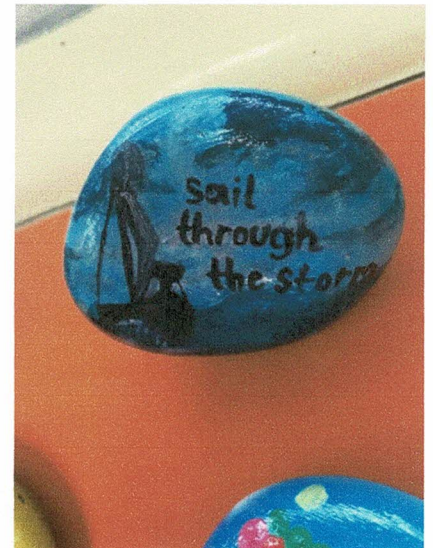
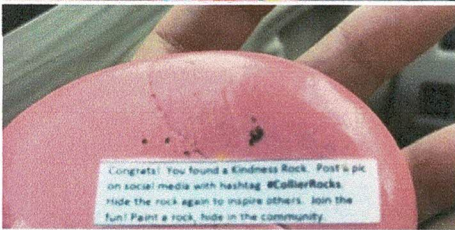
Andrea Polanco  
 Oakridge Middle School  
 7<sup>th</sup> Civics  
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Additional pictures of our kindness rock project.



AT&T LTE 2:14 PM 34%  
 Beth McBride added 2 new photos  
 — at Collier County Public School District.  
 Thursday at 5:27 PM · Naples, FL

I just found this outside of my building at work  
 #collierRocks #ccpsproud #ccpsstrong Now, where to hide it next??



Planet Smoothie (6420 Naples Blvd., Suite...  
 October 24 · 🌐

#CollierRocks We found this in the store this morning and brought a smile and great reminder to us. Thank you whomever hid it here and we'll make sure to keep it going. #naples... Continue Reading

👤 You, Mishelle Brittany and 4 others