

Safety on the Bus



Brayton Elementary School
North Adams, Massachusetts

Subject Area
Interdisciplinary Unit—
Language Arts, Health,
Social Studies, Reading, Art

Area of Service
Public Safety

Grade Level
Grade 3 and Grade 5

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In Brief

Third graders decided they had endured their last moments of torment from bullies on the bus. Enlisting the help of fifth graders, they interviewed students, school administrators and bus company personnel to better understand the problem of safety on the school bus. In the process, they discovered strategies for improving their own behavior and ways to make the buses throughout the city more user-friendly.

Learner Outcomes

Students learn to:

- Explain and describe a point of view in a public setting;
- Gather information and data to support solutions;
- Examine their own behaviors toward becoming good citizens;
- Understand that they can make a difference;
- Practice active listening;
- Use mediation techniques;
- Plan and host an event;
- Mentor peers;
- Break down stereotypes; and
- Write using a variety of genres.

MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS



This unit is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Listed are the subject areas and the learning strands addressed:

English/Language Arts

Language strand: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Literature strand: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18

Composition strand: 19, 20, 21, 24, 25

Science and Technology

Inquiry strand: 1, 2, 3, 9

OVERVIEW

The Need

Students in the third grade at Brayton Elementary School were troubled by bus problems and felt powerless to change the situation. Some students were reporting upset stomachs or were unable to settle down upon arrival at school because of bullying behavior on the bus. Some parents chose to drive the students to school.

A CSL Response

Third graders were eager to talk about inappropriate behavior such as swearing, vandalism to school property, yelling and pushing, objects being thrown and the general lack of discipline that seemed to be universal on school buses. During these discussions, students made lists that identified areas of concern and talked about what they could do to make things better. They researched what other communities do to ensure bus safety. During the initial year of the project, students worked on reducing incidents of bullying. They role-played to discover ways to prevent bullying behavior. Recognizing that fifth graders were often the culprits, the third graders enlisted their help in identifying poor behavior and putting an end to it. The younger children promoted the role of mediation. They also informed school administrators of problems on the bus and suggested possible solutions. The second year, the third graders decided that the bus drivers could be an important part of the solution and designed a project to get to know the drivers better. Students recognized the importance of having drivers feel part of the school community, with a voice in policy and discipline. During the project's third year, third graders plan to explore the role that parents and community members can play in promoting safety on the bus.

I learned you need to stay out of other people's business. I've also learned to respect other people's feelings. I dislike when other people use foul language. I think the bullies should lay off the younger kids. They shouldn't take their anger out on the kids when it happens at home.

Jordan Moon,
5th grade student



Third and fifth graders role-playing good bus behavior.

We have learned that it is probably aggravating for a bus driver when he has to drive and keep all of the kids under control. We also learned that if you get to know your bus driver, he or she can be a really good friend.

Ross Modena, Student



Brayton School students Kelsey Robare, 10, right, and Frank Albis, 11, on bullhorn, led their classmates in Bus Driver Appreciation Day.

Service Component

Significant changes resulted from the third graders' campaign to improve safety on the bus. The students presented their concerns to all parties involved in a non-confrontational way, without placing blame. In the process, they discovered strategies for improving their own behavior and ways to make the buses throughout the city more user-friendly. By seeking the input of bus drivers, the students involved them in the solution. The students rewrote school policy and presented their work to the school committee, who approved the revisions. As a result of the students' efforts, the number of bus incidents has been cut in half.

Celebration

The students invited parents, teachers, school officials, public officials, bus company owners and employees and community members to a luncheon where they led team-building activities. They also presented a play about bullying on the bus and made proposals for improving bus behavior. Everyone received certificates of participation and agreed on common goals to prevent violence not only on the bus but throughout the school community.

OUTCOMES

Academic Gains

Students learned that they could make a difference. They learned active listening skills, peer mediation strategies, letter writing, how to host an event, how to role play as a means of looking at problems, and how to write letters of inquiry, invitation, and thanks. They practiced public speaking to express effectively their points of view and discuss issues. They applied their reading skills to gather information and data and to gain perspective and understanding.

Societal Gains

Students examined their own behavior and values and realized that they have a stake in being good citizens. They learned to address individual problems through group effort and to develop leadership skills for the good of the community. As a result of their efforts, the school and community are now aware of the problems that exist in transporting students to and from school. Students have worked on their own responsibilities on the bus and have developed a relationship with the bus drivers to promote trust and understanding. The coordinator of transportation is “on board” with a commitment to listen to students’ needs and to act in a way that will improve the situation. This project and its success can continue to be extended in countless directions. All children will share in the increased safety that will be part of the bus routine.

Community Partners

Over the course of three years, this project has expanded in scope and community partners. Students identified the stakeholders in the community and invited them to participate in defining ways to provide safe transportation to all students in the school system. The stakeholders include:

- School committee
- School councils
- PTO
- Bus drivers
- Owners of the bus company
- Mayor
- North Adams Public Library
- Transportation coordinator
- North Adams Police
- Teachers

TIES TO THE MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS		
LEARNING STANDARDS/ OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY	ASSESSMENT
<p>English/Language Arts</p> <p>LANGUAGE STRAND</p> <p>Standard 1: Use agreed upon rules, informal and formal, for discussions in small and large groups.</p> <p>Students discussed problems on the bus and brainstormed ways to fix them.</p> <p>Check list for discussion. Did I raise my hand? Did I practice active listening? Did I contribute? Teacher also assessed through direct observation.</p> <p>Standard 3: Plan and present effective dramatic readings, recitations and performances that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience and purpose.</p> <p>Students wrote and performed a play for an audience of students, teachers, parents, administrators, bus drivers and policemen. They had a clear purpose of demonstrating bus problems and asking for help.</p> <p>Presentation assessment.</p> <p>COMPOSITION</p> <p>Standard 20: Select and use appropriate genres, modes of reasoning, and speaking styles when writing for different audiences and rhetorical purposes.</p> <p>Students wrote formal letters to school administrators telling them about the project and informal letters to 5th graders asking for help.</p> <p>Letter writing assessment.</p>		
<p>Science and Technology</p> <p>INQUIRY</p> <p>Standard 1: Observe and describe familiar objects and events, identifying details, similarities and differences.</p> <p>Students observed behavior on the school bus and playground. They discussed behavior of third graders, fifth graders, bus drivers and adult monitors.</p> <p>Rubric used to grade a compare-and-contrast essay on what the bus had been like before the project and how it had changed after the project.</p> <p>Standard 3: Make predictions based on past experience with a particular material or object.</p> <p>Students predicted whether or not the fifth graders would be willing to help them based on the behavior they had observed on the bus. Based on their real-life observations, third graders also predicted whether the bus drivers would become their friends.</p> <p>Students created a chart showing predictions and were assessed on originality, creativity and pride of presentation.</p>		

LESSON PLAN Choosing Topics

Objective

Students will collect a variety of sample logos and mission statements and, in small teams, design a logo and mission statement for their group to develop a sense of community. Mission statements and logos will be displayed and the thinking behind them will be explained to the large group. Students will examine the question of how organizations develop unity and commitment among their members. They will also explore the sub-question of how they can apply this knowledge to improve bus behavior.

Learning Standards

Social Studies, Strands 1, 3, 4

Science and Technology, Strand 3

English Language Arts, Language Strand

Materials

Samples of various logos and mission statements

Markers and large paper

Rubric for assessment

Procedure

Part 1

Examine and discuss the importance of logos and mission statements:

- What is the school's mission statement?
- What is the purpose of a mission statement?
- Would a mission statement for this project guide us and how?
- How would a logo help our project?
- What are the parts of a good logo?
- Which commercial logos do you recognize immediately?

Part 2

Break into small groups to design mission statement and logo.

Form cooperative groups by assigning roles within group.

Discuss tasks and perform them.

Be ready to report back to large group for presentation of products and rationale.

LESSON PLAN continued

Part 3

Product, Performance and Presentation:

As a group, with each member contributing, convince the class of the value of each logo and mission statement.

Each group presents.

Each group fields questions about the products and the logic behind them.

Each class member evaluates the logos and statements through use of a rubric to determine which one will be adopted by the class.

All logos and mission statements are displayed for all to see.

Assessment strategies

Rubric for product and presentation

Self-evaluation for group work

Competencies

Collect, clarify, design, develop, display, explain

Criteria	Points Possible	Student Evaluation	Teacher Evaluation
Everyone contributed			
Made eye contact			
Good diction			
Good word choices			
Projected			
and questions			

TIMELINE

September

Identify problem.

October

Creation of worry book allows students to talk about fears.

November

Identify 3 areas of focus—bullying, bus drivers, community.

December

Invite 5th graders to assist effort. Examine strategies for improving behavior.

January

Interview students, administrators, bus personnel.

LESSON PLAN continued

Product Assessment Rubric for Logo

Criteria	Points Possible	Student evaluates	Teacher evaluates
Useful for bus project			
Clear message			
Pride in presentation			
Clear explanation			
Team effort			
Good design			
Total			

Reflection

- Reflection journals
- Public Presentation
- Play writing and improvisation
- Brochure of rules for and by students

School Bus Rules

"A safe bus is a happy bus."

Written For Kids
By Kids

Loading the Bus

- Once the driver has opened the door, get on the bus as quickly and orderly as you can. Do not push or shove.
- If the seats in the front are filled, move towards the back of the bus. Choose a seat and sit right down. Once you are seated do not get up again or try to change seats.
- Keep your feet and your knapsack out of the aisle. Keep your hands and your head inside the bus.

Listen to the bus driver at all times.

KID TIPS

Fighting, teasing or yelling

- Don't join in.
- Ignore them.
- Tell the bus driver.
- Remind them of the bus rules.
- Tell them to stop.

Bad language

- Tell the bus driver.
- Tell them to stop.
- Tell them they are being a bad role model for the younger kids.
- Don't start fighting because of it.

appropriate behavior

- Tell the bus driver.
- Try sitting in the front seat to get away from it.
- Bring something to read on the bus to keep yourself busy.
- Tell them they could...

Brochure written by kids for kids.
(See Addendum)

TIMELINE

February

Research approach of other communities.

March

Write play. Host bus driver appreciation celebration.

April

Identify important school and community leaders to be invited/involved in public forum.

May

Research ice-breakers, games for forum.

June

Host public forum.

Assessment

Within the context of this unit several strategies were implemented to assess the student's progress. First, the use of a rubric by both the teacher and the student was interspersed throughout the unit. Using a rubric, students not only completed a self-evaluation of their ability to follow rules during a discussion, but also assessed their oral presentations by matching the descriptors on the rubric to their performance. Second, the teacher gathered valuable insight into the child's progress by directly observing of the student's progress as the project developed from its original problem solving session to group presentations. Finally, students monitored their own progress using check lists and comparison charts. Students kept a check list of behaviors observed on the bus. During this project students continued to reflect on their progress by comparing the actual outcomes achieved to the initial unit goals. In an attempt to evaluate the knowledge they gained in this project, students were encouraged to utilize a variety of assessment tools and were empowered to participate in their own assessment.

Responses to Bus Ride Questions
Post Assessment

5th Graders

- Kids should think before they do things
- good
- it's fun
- the bus driver is nice
- I feel safer
- I am less afraid
- I like talking to my bus driver
- It's still hard
- The people who did the project, their feelings may have changed, but the not the other people
- it's not that bad
- the bus driver takes care of problems for us

3rd Graders

- sometimes scared
- ok
- it's better
- happy

Bus Incidents for one week - 2-8-99

Incident	How many times
Pushing others on the bus	3
Standing up on the bus	7
Inappropriate language	53
Screaming/yelling on the bus	18
Standing in the aisle while the bus is moving	6
Fights breaking out	6
Taking things from others	4
Inappropriate gestures	3
Hitting the bus driver	1
Yelling at the bus driver	2
Playing with the emergency door	3
Putting body parts out the window	4
Changing seats	6
Hitting others	5
Name calling	3
Kneeling on the bus seat	3

BUS SURVEY

- Are there times on the bus that you feel scared?
Yes No
- Do other kids boss you around on the bus?
Yes No
- Do kids fight on the bus?
Yes No
- Do you worry on the bus?
Yes No
- Do kids bring things they shouldn't on the bus?
Yes No If yes what kind of things?
- Do kids throw things on the bus or out the bus window?
Yes No
- Do kids swear on the bus or make not nice gestures?
Yes No
- Do kids act differently on the bus than at school or at home?
Yes No
- Do kids listen to the Bus Driver?
Yes No

Bus Survey

Item #	5TH Yes	5TH No	% Yes	3RD YES	3RD NO	% Yes
1	3	14	17	11	7	61
2	4	13	23	11	7	61
3	14	3	82	17	1	94
4	6	11	42	11	7	61
5	6	11	42	11	7	61
6	14	3	82	14	4	61
7	14	3	82	17	1	77
8	11	3	82	17	1	99
9	3	6	64	15	3	63
10	8	14	17	2	16	15
11	6	9	47	13	6	66
12	15	11	42	18	5	72
13	15	2	88	18	0	100
14	15	2	88	15	3	100
15	15	2	88	18	0	100
16	16	1	94	17	1	100
17	5	4	8	29	12	66
18	5	7	5	29	17	1
19	8	7	2	47	14	4

CONNECTING TO MCAS: OPEN RESPONSE QUESTION

Compare / Contrast

At the beginning of the school year, third graders reported that school bus behavior was causing problems for many students. Incidences of bullying, bus vandalism, swearing, thrown objects and other behavioral problems were a cause for concern. At the end of the school year and after students had worked together to find ways to end bullying, fewer problems existed on the bus.

Write a compare and contrast essay on what bus behavior was like before and after the project.

Because CSL honors all learning styles and allows students to be doers, it ties in nicely with the curriculum frameworks.

Karen LeFave,
Grade 3 teacher

Challenges

This project had the potential to be a political bombshell. New legislation allows litigation for harassing behavior in school and million dollar awards have been made in lawsuits involving school failure to act upon reported incidents.

It is easy to point the finger of blame and make accusations. Brainstorming could have become gripe sessions with no solutions.

Third graders identified older students as some of the bullies.

Both teachers and students recognized that this project was huge and could be overwhelming.

Solutions

Teachers kept careful records of reports, informing administrators of incidents that required immediate discipline.

Students were encouraged to talk about their own shortcomings and learn how to improve their behavior. They became peer mentors to other students. They learned the art of active listening and gave all groups the opportunity to present themselves in a positive way.

Third graders invited fifth graders, the oldest group in the school and the source of many of the culprits, to partner with them in this project and to help them find solutions.

Students and teachers did not try to fix everything at once, recognizing that getting the problem on the table was a huge first step. They broke the project into sections. The first year, they worked on recognizing and fixing bullying behavior. The second year, they worked on getting to know bus drivers as individuals and giving them a voice in school communities. Next year, they will work on parent and community involvement.

I learned that kids' behavior on the bus is much different than elsewhere. I learned that I should not be a bully and hurt kids. People should respect other people on the bus. I should set a good example for other kids on the bus.

Komal Shah,
5th grade student

Teacher explaining project to third and fifth graders.

Extending the Vision

Next year, students will work with parents, neighborhoods and community members to encourage them to become the eyes and ears to help children be safe.

Students are learning that they can play a big role in violence prevention and making schools safe. They are learning how to be pro-active and that civic involvement leads to improvement.

Students have developed a concern for the well-being of others and recognize their power to improve conditions for themselves and others.

Students have expressed a desire to share their new understanding by teaching students in other schools.

In Conclusion: School's Role in the Community

The third graders' campaign to make buses safer places brought the school and community together to address an issue that could otherwise have been divisive. Teachers were amazed at their students' ability to take ownership of the initiative. The project demonstrated the effectiveness of the model of students as workers, teachers as coaches. Students were empowered by the experience, while teachers reported feeling inspired and renewed.

