

The Chugach Way

Why do we call staff by first names?

One of the very first differences that newcomers perceive about Chugach compared to other schools is in how students and staff address each other.

“Good morning, Jean!” or “Hello Caycee!” our Kindergarteners will say upon arriving in class each morning. In fact, Chugach students are on a first name basis with staff throughout the building, whether it be Lorenzo, the custodian, Rosa, the director of the lunch program, Sue, the principal, or Diane in the office. In 99.9% of schools throughout the nation, students call all adult staff throughout their schools by “Mr.” or “Mrs.” So, why exactly did the founders of Chugach decide that staff and students would call each other by their first names? And what do we try to accomplish by doing so?

According to Upper Group teacher Kate, calling each other by our first names helps to instill a sense of mutual respect. “If I’m Mrs. Danyluk to the kids, then I’m demanding authority. But kids show me respect and authority without me having to demand it.” Our librarian Amy agrees. “Teachers and students show each other mutual respect in our building and it comes through in our interactions and how we treat each other – not just by utilizing a traditional title such as ‘Mrs.’”

Having students call their teachers by their first names also helps reinforce other parts of the Chugach philosophy – specifically the idea of “Family Groups.” Kindergarten teacher Jean shares, “It helps show that we are all on the same field learning together as a community of learners.” Middle Group teacher Pam agrees that, “When we call each other by our first names it reinforces the concept of a family group – that we are learning together and can participate in problem-solving together on a mutual level.”

Finally, Jean believes that being on a first name basis helps develop personal connections between students and staff that help them feel safe and secure. Fifth grader Liza Lebo agrees. She likes calling teachers by their first names because it makes it feel like she knows them better. “Calling my teacher Mrs. Danyluk sounds so serious. It’s much more comforting to just call her Kate.”

By Jenny Loudon