

World changers in training

PALs mentor younger students, try to make a difference

Clusters of students line the Cypress Elementary hallway. A fifth grader frowns in concentration as he tries to divide fractions. A kindergartner claps excitedly as he pulls ahead in a game of Candyland. Two third graders squeal as the Jenga tower comes tumbling down. Alongside them, high school students teach, laugh, applaud and encourage.

Each week, PALs went to an assortment of elementary schools, as well as Cedar Park Middle School, to mentor students. Helping their PALees learn everything from addition to social skills, PALs played games, helped them on homework, taught one-on-one and made conversation. Many PALs looked forward to these elementary school visits, enjoying the opportunity to spend time with the younger generation.

"My favorite part is when I first see one of my PALees, and she runs up to me and hugs me," senior [Erin Clevlen](#) said. "It makes me feel important, and just makes me happy and warms my heart because she's always so cute and excited."

For others, seeing the impact they could have in younger lives and in the community by the simple act of giving their time, was eye-opening.

"The best part was seeing how you've affected your PALees," junior [Regan Brittain](#) said. "A lot of them just need someone to talk to, to know that someone cares, and you can do that by sitting and talking with them and just being a friend."

PALs also helped their PALees through the harder parts of growing up.

"I think it's really important that we go and be with those kids to help give them advice, and just help them through their struggles," senior [Lauren Graves](#) said. "We really do help them just by being there for them."

Often times, PALees were not hesitant to express their appreciation for their older mentors.

"I love seeing how excited they get each time we go," junior [Leland Buckingham](#) said. "For me, I think seeing that and realizing the impact I can have is the best part. PALs is a really fun way to make a difference in someone's life."

Others recognized the influence they had on their PALees, remembering their own childhoods.

"When I was younger, I remember looking up to the older kids, almost like they were celebrities," Graves said. "I think that's how a lot of the kids look at us, and I like that we get to be someone they really look up to. It's just an awesome opportunity."

But the PALees weren't the only ones who benefitted from the relationship.

"We learned that we can each help," Brittain said. "We can make a difference, just by mentoring younger kids."

Besides realizing their potential to help improve the community, spending time with their PALees also showed PALs how alike they really are.

"One of the biggest things I've learned from my PALees is how to be a better listener," Clevlen said. "I really enjoy talking to her, and I've realized you can have a good conversation with someone, no matter their age. Even little people have big stories to tell."