

SHARK FINS Rising: Awesome Power Beneath the Surface

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Abstract : A critical challenge for a new school is creating an inclusive, meaningful culture. While a new school offers a “shiny’ exterior, its culture has yet to be created. In 2016, Charles J. Colgan, Sr. High School in Prince William County, opened its door. In its inaugural year, the FIN Friends club was created to start the process of building connections between general education and special education students. In eight years, the club has become a relentless contributor to the most inclusive, welcoming school culture possible. Through a commitment to consistent, year-round activities, the FINS accepts students from all schools and all grades. All schools strive for inclusion and a positive culture. Our model takes explicit action toward these elements. What we have created works; it is replicable and supports any school to build a more inclusive culture. Connections and belonging are directly related to every educational goal, including academic progress, equity, social-emotional health, etc. We want to share our story and collaborate with schools to create their own inclusion movement.

Keywords : inclusion, culture, connections, belonging

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