



Hillsborough Township the First School District in New Jersey to Roll Out

OAR's *Kit for Kids* Peer Education Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13, 2023

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ARLINGTON, VA – In an unprecedented effort to promote empathy and autism acceptance among today's youth, Hillsborough Township is the first School District in New Jersey to roll out the Organization for Autism Research's (OAR) *Kit for Kids* Peer Education Program, which teaches elementary and middle school students about their autistic peers.

The Hillsborough Township Board of Education approved *What's Up Nick?* - the central story of OAR's *Kit for Kids* program - as supplemental material for its School Counseling program. The school counselor delivered the lesson to all K-4 classes and focused on displaying empathy for children, especially those with autism.

"When Anthony Ferrera brought this to me as a possibility, I was elated," stated Hillsborough Superintendent of Schools, Mike Volpe. "This program is a great example of social and emotional learning and helps students understand and empathize with those around them, most especially students with autism. The fact that these materials were free was an absolute bonus!"

Hillsborough Elementary School's Counselor, Jennifer Baccarini, agrees. "With the third and fourth grade students, we read the book together and had really had a nice conversation about similarities and differences. Many of the students have been able to relate to Nick or know someone personally with autism," she states. "Some students have shared personal experiences which were really nice to hear. With the kindergarten, first grade, and second grade students, we have been talking about the word 'accepting' and what that means, as well as drawing pictures showing what being a good friend looks like. With all the grades we have also been discussing how we are all different and that is what makes not only HES, but the world a more interesting and wonderful place."

"I was happy to bring the program before Superintendent Volpe and the Hillsborough Board of Education as OAR continues our community outreach and am excited to have the program implemented in Hillsborough as the first school distinct in New Jersey to do so," said Anthony Ferrera Board of Directors, President, OAR NJ.

Since 2012, OAR has taught more than 190,000 children across the globe about autism through the popular *Kit for Kids* program. The program is centered around a children's illustrated booklet entitled "What's Up with Nick?", which is narrated through the eyes of a peer about the eponymous autistic character. It teaches students in grades K-8 that autistic individuals may think differently or need



some accommodations, but all students are of equal worth and should be treated as such. The core program includes 20 story booklets, a student-led lesson plan, a classroom poster, and helpful information for parents and teachers. OAR provides supplemental materials that can be accessed online or ordered by mail, such as games, animated videos, tip sheets, and workbooks to reinforce learning.

It is a goal of OAR's executive director, Kristen Essex, to widely establish *Kit for Kids* as a board-approved Tier 1 peer intervention in school districts across the country. "We are thrilled to see the *Kit for Kids* program being implemented in the Hillsborough Township School District," says Essex. "This program has already had a tremendous impact on students around the world, from the US to Vietnam, Botswana, and various other countries, teaching them about autism and promoting empathy and acceptance. We are grateful to the Hillsborough Township School District for their partnership in this important initiative, and we look forward to seeing the impact as this program continues to reach even more students."

OAR partners with school districts to promote autism acceptance and inclusion. For inquiries about using the peer education program in your school district, please contact Kimberly Ha, Senior Director, Research and Programs, at 703-243-9762 or kha@researchautism.org.

About OAR: The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) is a national non-profit organization formed and led by relatives of children and adults with autism spectrum disorders. OAR is dedicated to promoting research that can be applied to help families, educators, caregivers, and individuals with autism find much-needed answers to their immediate and urgent questions. Learn more at their Web site: www.researchautism.org.

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