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Program Helps Rox El Students Feel Comfortable, Connected at Lunch

Dec. 5, 2018 -- For a new student or one who is shy or introverted, the school lunchroom can be a nightmare. For any student, it can be loud, crowded and overwhelming.

So the staff at Roxboro Elementary is working to make their lunchroom a pleasant and welcoming place with the [Comfortable Cafeteria](#) program. Initiated by occupational therapist Cindy Rakow, Comfortable Cafeteria is part of a broader mental health initiative developed at Cleveland State University called [Every Moment Counts](#). Guided by the belief that “small moments can make big differences in how children feel and function in school” and “enjoyable experiences throughout the day promote feelings of emotional well-being,” the program is being implemented with Rox El’s 3rd and 4th graders over six weeks.

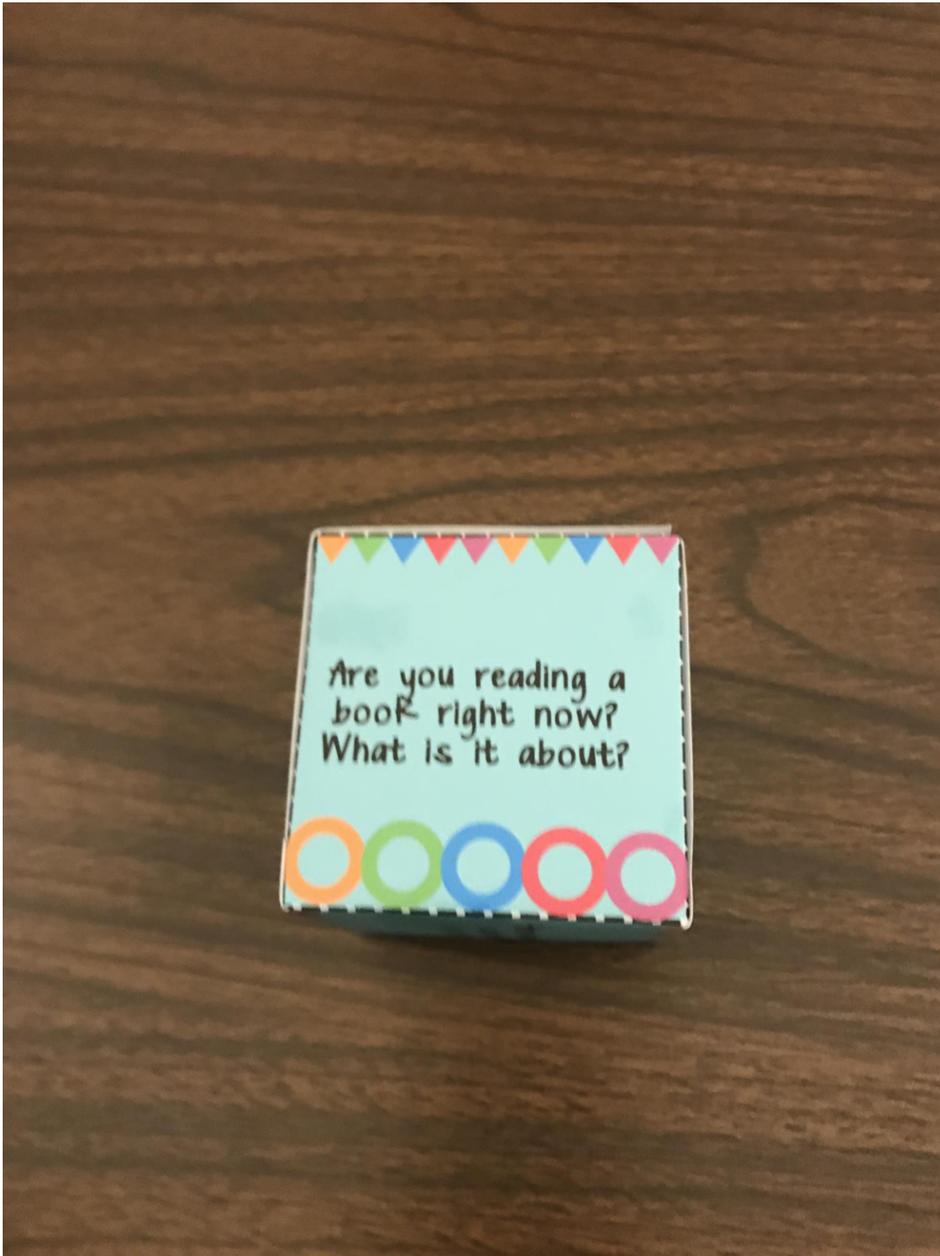
Lunchroom supervisor Patricia Earley and her staff have embraced the initiative with open arms. “It’s really about helping the children become better people; to have meaningful conversations, be good listeners and have good manners. That can go a long way as they grow up.”

Ms. Rakow and CSU graduate student Allison Kienzle practiced how to engage in conversation, especially with someone new, or someone new to you. On a recent Thursday, kids were pushed out of their comfort zones when they arrived at lunch to find they had a randomly assigned seat, perhaps next to someone they barely knew. But Ms. Rakow and Ms. Kienzle were there to help, handing each table a giant cube with questions printed on each side. Children rolled the cube and then asked the child near them about the last good book they read or how many siblings they have.

Nervous silence soon turned into friendly chatter and laughter as the children found similarities with their new friends. Ms. Earley is confident she and her staff will continue to push the Comfortable Cafeteria ideas beyond the six weeks and with her other lunch periods. “This is an ongoing process and something we’ll really stay on top of.”

The Comfortable Cafeteria program is also being piloted with Boulevard’s 3rd and 4th graders, with the hopes that lunchtime becomes a true mental break, a relaxing and enjoyable experience that helps children recharge so they can attack the afternoon refreshed and ready to learn.





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