



GIVING EVERY STUDENT THE RIGHT PAIR OF CLEATS: EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN THE CRAWFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

F For today's adults, memories of classroom parties loom large. A staple of elementary schools everywhere, the parties went something like this: one parent would bring a box of cupcakes; another would lead a song or game; another would read to the class while the clock inched toward dismissal. Whether for birthdays or Valentine's Day or the start of winter break, the parties brought students, teachers, and families together.

Today, those parties' days are numbered.

"Yeah, you can't do that anymore," laments Thomas Washington, superintendent of the Crawford Central School District. "Not unless certain rules and regulations are followed."

It might surprise yesterday's students, but the rules governing family involvement in schools — who can and can't chaperone a field trip or carry the marching band's equipment — have grown ever more strict. The rules stem from valid

safety concerns, says Washington, but he worries that something is lost when families are told to stay home. "It sends parents a message: 'You're a threat, and we don't want you here,'" he says. "And that's counterproductive, because parents and families are partners in students' success."

At Crawford Central's school with the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch, a district survey found fewer than five parents with requisite clearances, despite widespread eagerness among families to support the school community. "If I'm a parent, then I don't necessarily have ways to go get fingerprinted, go get a tuberculosis test, go get my paperwork notarized, and so on," Washington explains. "I might not have transportation, or maybe I can't cover the cost."

In an effort to address this identified barrier to parent engagement, the district hosted a clearance event. "The whole community is pitching in," says Ann Noonan, director of technology integration and community outreach. "We have a

physician's assistant who's agreed to administer the tuberculosis test right here in the schools. We have staff members who can notarize parents' paperwork. And with support from The Grable Foundation, we've been able to cover parents' fees."

The result? More families engaging with schools, stronger relationships among parents and teachers, and better outcomes for Crawford Central's students. The effort epitomizes the school district's mission: removing barriers to students' and families' success.

It's a mission that led Crawford Central to join the Western Pennsylvania Learning 2025 Alliance, a regional cohort of school districts working together — and with peers around the country — to create student-centered, future-driven, equity-focused schools that prepare every learner for tomorrow. Led by local superintendents and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Alliance convenes for workshops, networking opportunities, and professional development that helps districts like Crawford Central do what they

do best: provide a path for every student to become the best of whoever they are.

“To us, that’s what equity is,” says Washington. “It means making sure all of our students have what they need to reach their full potential. Think of it this way: We give every student on the football team a pair of cleats. But if we give them the wrong size, then the cleats don’t help very much. It’s our job to give every student the cleats they need to be successful.”

For Crawford Central, those “cleats” include guaranteeing breakfast and lunch for the entire student body, redesigning curricula to spark deeper classroom engagement, and ensuring that families can engage with their schools.

It’s work that takes everyone, from parents and teachers to coaches, business owners, and beyond. To that end, Crawford Central’s strategic planning process invites the community to help design the district’s future.

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The process, officials say, has created a new Crawford Central School District — one in which schools and the community work hand-in-hand in service of the area’s students. The strategic plan is complete, says Washington,

but the work of removing barriers continues. “When we finished the plan, we didn’t disband the co-led committees. Instead, we said, ‘Okay, we have our goals and we have our action steps. Now, let’s work together to get it done for kids.’”

And with community partnerships and engaged families, “Getting it done is exactly what we’re going to do.”

