



“STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO”

HOW THE FRANKLIN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT EQUIPS LEARNERS TO EXCEL

The Franklin Regional School District’s “portrait of a graduate” makes a promise — a pledge to the community that says, in effect, *When your children graduate from Franklin Regional’s schools, they’ll be ready to thrive in the world. And they’ll strive for excellence in all they do.*

How the district fulfills that promise looks different for every learner. But when Superintendent Gennaro Piraino pictures a graduate, one particular student pops into his mind.

“My son is about to graduate,” Piraino explains. And thanks to the district’s College in High School program, “He’s going to walk out of here with 52 college credits. He’s interested in the business side of athletics, so he’s been interning with the district’s business office. We’ve been able to offer that real-world experience.”

And his son’s trajectory is not an exception, Piraino says. “These opportunities exist for every

student — for *all* students at Franklin Regional.”

The district has long been at the forefront of preparing learners for real-world success. So when Franklin Regional was invited to join the Western Pennsylvania Learning 2025 Alliance — a cohort of school districts working together to create student-centered, equity-focused, future-driven schools — Piraino jumped at the opportunity.

“It was a natural continuation of the work we’re already doing,” he says, noting the district’s yearslong efforts to ensure every learner can reach their full potential. Franklin Regional has worked with nationally renowned experts like the Successful Practices Network to enhance the district’s design, and “to be part of a regional collaboration is an added bonus. It’s been a phenomenal opportunity for us to support one another and learn from each others’ models.”

Led by local superintendents and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Alliance convenes for workshops, networking

opportunities, and professional development that helps districts like Franklin Regional do what they do best: equip every student with the opportunities, resources, and support to strive for excellence.

“And when we say excellence, we mean academically, socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and physically,” says Jennifer DiFulvio, the district’s assistant superintendent of elementary education and support services. “We really have a whole-child focus here in our district.”

That focus, she says, requires an all-hands approach — one that brings students, families, and community partners together. The district’s College in High School program, for example, pairs Franklin Regional students with nearly a dozen colleges and universities, from the nearby Westmoreland County Community College to institutions further afield. Students can take engineering courses through the prestigious Rochester Institute of Technology or learn the basics of biomedicine at Missouri S&T.

Preparing students for rigorous, college-level courses requires safe, supportive classroom learning environments. To that end, Franklin Regional offers multiple tiers of mental health support, with school-based therapists stationed in every building. A new partnership with the University of Pittsburgh adds even more support, with social services liaisons who can connect learners to comprehensive mental and behavioral health resources.

The response, says DiFulvio, has been “overwhelmingly positive,” with students now able to access “a level of mental health support they’ve never before experienced.”

Meanwhile, officials say they’re on a mission to listen: to students and teachers on one hand, and to parents, families, and caregivers on the other. Working with the Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Franklin Regional has launched focus groups that bring these stakeholders together. Collectively, says DiFulvio, these groups are designing the future of family-school engagement,

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building a school district where teachers and parents work hand-in-hand to help every student pursue their interests and dreams.

A Franklin Regional parent herself, DiFulvio knows what deep engagement can do. “I’ve seen it from both sides: as an administrator, and as someone with one child who’s graduated and two more who are Franklin Regional students,” she says. “I always tell people: We have an excellent special education program. We have an excellent arts program. Our kids do really well academically, and they get all kinds of real-world work opportunities. And when parents and teachers work together, it just makes all of that even better.”

To Gennaro Piraino, making things better is what the work is all about. The district’s mission — “to strive for excellence, learning, achievement, and citizenship in all we do” — isn’t some abstract statement, the superintendent explains. Instead, “It’s ingrained across everything: every classroom, every program, every partnership.

“And it’s ingrained in our students, too.”

