



SUPPORT SERVICES HELP FRAZIER SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENTS FIND THEIR WAY TOWARD SUCCESS

When the day ends at Frazier Elementary School, learning support teacher James Kline often has a visitor. One of the school's fourth-graders drops by if he's got a homework assignment he's likely to struggle with on his own.

It's a decision the child makes by himself, along with a hundred other small choices he makes independently this year. Do I argue with a classmate, or take a moment to breathe and let go of my anger? When school work confuses me, do I ignore it or ask for help? And when I'm really overwhelmed by my feelings, do I act out or let somebody know?

Throughout this school year, the answers have been positive ones.

"He had about five discipline referrals last year. He hasn't had any this year. He's always met our goals," Kline says. "If he has any kind of anxiety, he knows now to raise his hand and ask to come down to my room for a break, where he's not disrupting class."

Amanda Law, Frazier Elementary's principal, credits Kline with this student's progress. But Kline is quick

to point out that he's not alone: "It's been a huge group effort," he says. "There are so many people who have to be on the same page and work together to be able to support him."

That group effort is bearing fruit. Through a range of support services, creatively redesigned spaces, and valuable training, kids and adults at Frazier are helping one another in powerful ways.

"Sometimes in small school districts, it is easy to fall back on what you did before, instead of moving forward and trying new things. As we move on from the pandemic, I don't want to go backwards. We've done so much — so many different things that have worked, and we can tweak things as we go," Frazier's superintendent Bill Henderson says. "We don't have all the answers yet. But we're getting the oars in the water."

UNDERSTANDING THE ACES

Last August, Intermediate Unit 1's Melissa Hunter spent a day at Frazier training the staff in trauma-informed teaching.

"Trauma is something that, of course, is very common," Hunter says. "It's just now being pushed

out in terms of our educational institutions as a way to understand what is acting as a barrier to learning."

Educators could spend years learning about trauma, and it's "a very heavy topic," Hunter says. So her training session lasted just a few hours, introducing teachers to research about ACEs — adverse childhood experiences — that can make learning difficult.

For many teachers, it was eye-opening — and encouraging.

The training "helps with how we look at the kids, but we're acknowledging that the staff is struggling as well," Henderson says. "Through the stressors of the entire pandemic, they had to change everything that they did."

Along with staff training, Frazier has a new social-emotional learning curriculum. And they've continued developing a mental health clinic within the school, Henderson says, "so parents and students didn't have to leave to get their services."

To make all of this happen, Henderson has gotten creative about funding, meeting with organizations like the local Rotary Club. Grant funding from The Grable Foundation has helped the district

develop their social-emotional curriculum, build “calming corners” around the elementary school, and add items to the learning support room.

On a recent morning, a student with sensory needs came to see learning support teacher Ashley Zocco. “He chose a squishy item and utilized the new chair and the lap blanket,” she says. He was delighted, and Zocco took a moment to write down his comments.

“Mrs. Zocco,” he said, “this is so nice of the school to do this for kids like me. I can’t believe they would get all of this stuff for every classroom, so when kids feel like I do, they can all get the help they need. This is just seriously so nice!”

The district has also joined the Western Pennsylvania Learning 2025 Alliance, a regional group of school districts working together and with peers across the country to ensure their districts are doing all they

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can to prepare their learners for a thriving future.

Led by local superintendents and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Alliance brings Henderson together with leaders of other districts to share and workshop innovative ideas. He’s also used grant funding to travel to other schools around the country in search of ideas and solutions that will serve the Frazier community.

Gradually, a sense of perseverance and possibility is taking root in the classrooms and hallways of this community.

That fourth-grader, for example? His growing ability to manage his

emotions has led him to the honor roll. Kline finds himself inspired by his student, who now has friends who look forward to seeing him and teachers who are glad to have him in class.

When the boy is having a difficult morning, Kline offers this advice: “We’re not going to quit today. You can think about it tomorrow morning when you wake up. But today, we’re not going to quit. We’re going to do our best today.”

