

Training the Trainer

Transforming the Vel R. Phillips
School: A Case Study

**“This *Culture Shift*
was a *Huge Win!*”**



The Vel R. Phillips School is part of the Juvenile Justice Center in Milwaukee. Students are in secure detention and many are awaiting court decisions that could severely impact their lives. Roughly half of the student population has a learning or behavioral disability. Students attend classes with their living groups instead of grade levels and for most, the school is only temporary.

“Students’ trauma is right in your face,” explains school social worker, Amandla Daniels.

“**Student trauma is right in your face.**”

THE CHALLENGE

Although many students have experienced significant adversity, there wasn’t much talk about trauma, its prevalence or its impact. “This was not a place I wanted to come every day, and it was apparent this culture was rubbing off on the students,” says Bekki Crowley, special education teacher. Crowley’s observations were confirmed by data.

In the 2016-17 school year alone:

- Staff were absent an average of 30.1 days
- Students were removed from classrooms 750 times
- There were 83 classroom altercations

THE SOLUTION: A THREE-PART STRATEGY

Crowley, Daniels and others were looking for solutions. In January of 2018, they were selected by administration to attend Train the Trainer: Seven Essential Ingredients of Trauma Sensitive Schools with Sara Daniel, Senior Trainer and Vice President of Educational Services at Wellpoint Care Network.

“Sara contextualized the TSS concepts and helped us navigate situations, even coaching us on how to model or say certain things,” says Vel R. Phillips School social worker, Amandla Daniels.

PART 1: TRAINING

Training takes a nontraditional approach, providing participants individualized support to effectively turn their learning into action. After each session, Crowley and Daniels were able to use Daniel as their resource.

PART 2: COACHING

“We were able to go into deeper discussions on how these concepts would apply to their unique school setting,” explains Daniel, who has been in education for more than 20 years, and a TSS expert more than half her career. Together, the Vel R. Phillips teachers and Sara strategized how to bring what they learned back to their colleagues and students. They focused mainly on:

- Building staff awareness
- Creating perspective shift
- Finding a common understanding of the challenges students face

“We started with the adults taking care of themselves.”

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Crowley and Daniels decided to begin with Caregiver Capacity, knowing that vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout had taken a hold of school culture. “We started with the adults taking care of themselves so we could continue to do this work,” says Crowley. Early tactics included encouraging staff to remember why they chose their jobs, and creating opportunities to increase vulnerability and trust among staff members.

PERSPECTIVE SHIFT TAKES TIME

They were then able to move to Perspective Shift, including a ripple effect of change between teachers and students.

But, “Change is hard,” says Daniels. “Many staff members have been doing this for so long.”

Learning how to model behavior, role play, and be vulnerable helped Crowley and Daniels forge better relationships with their colleagues.

“The changes are the result of a lot of small, daily, ongoing, and constant conversations,” says Bekki Crowley, special education teacher, Vel R. Phillips School.

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OUTCOMES

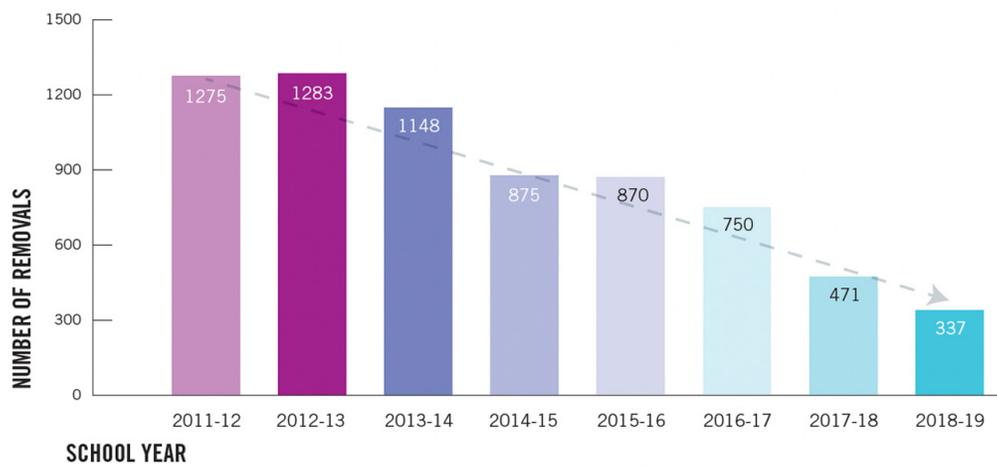
“Schools like this, who take the time to operationalize trauma sensitive ideas, often develop a culture where students and staff are better regulated and more likely to develop positive relationships,” says Daniel. “There is also an increased sense of having reason to be and that’s important for all of us.

In the two years since their first Train the Trainer session, Vel R. Phillips School has witnessed clear and positive outcomes.

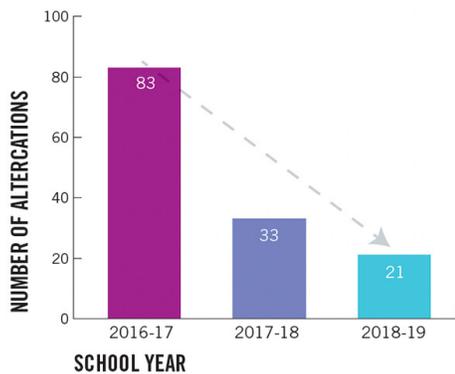
WHAT THE DATA SAYS:

- In the 2018-19 school year, there were only 21 classroom altercations, compared to 83 the year before. (That's a 75% drop in classroom altercations)
- The average number of staff absences fell from 30 to 12 days per year in two years.

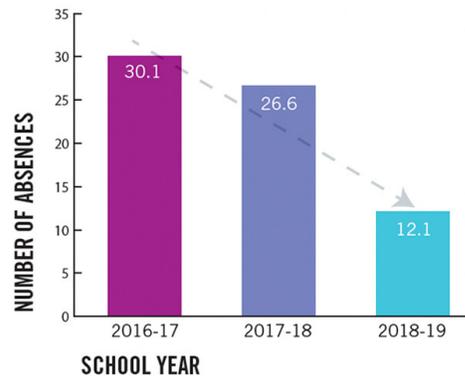
STUDENT REMOVALS



CLASSROOM ALTERCATIONS



STAFF ABSENCES



These improvements can result in a number of additional positive outcomes, such as fewer removals from the classroom, reduced staff turnover and better engagement overall. In addition:

- Students can now go to a “Chill Zone,” when they need to regulate
- They might not know exactly what has changed, but students come out and say, “No, we can’t fight in this class.”
- Instead of, “What’s wrong with you?” teachers ask, “What happened to you?”
- Staff members utilize relationship-based tactics, rebuilding trust school-wide

“This culture shift is a huge win for us,” says Crowley. She and Daniels attribute this revitalization to caregiver capacity. “People are now having discussions about how things bother them, and reminding each other to take care of themselves,” continues Crowley. “We’re kind of like a big family now.”

“We have each other’s backs,” adds Daniels. “And we know that now.”



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