

Teaching Proactively

How Proactive Interventions Led to Sustainable Results at Edgewood Elementary School



EVOLVING EXISTING PROGRAMS

Leaders and faculty at **Edgewood Elementary School** in Greenfield had been studying trauma-sensitive education for a few years when they first encountered Wellpoint Care Network, so they were already aware of how stress and trauma can impact students' learning.

But after Principal Meg Boyd and her staff saw a presentation on Wellpoint's Seven Essential Ingredients of Trauma Sensitive Schools at a training event, they realized they had only scratched the surface of this important field of study. Curious to learn more, Principal Boyd approached Wellpoint to request a customized training, tailored to Edgewood's specific model, goals and needs.

“Whenever there’s a *disruption*, we need to figure out root causes and put a plan in place to address the actual *problem*.”

As a National School of Character, Edgewood has schoolwide programs that focus on developing traits like respect and responsibility among staff and students to help foster a caring school community. But recently, staff had noticed that some students were struggling with this programming more than others.

In order to be effective, their programs needed to work with *all* of their students. The school was committed to figuring out how to best meet student needs while ensuring an atmosphere that facilitated learning. “In school, you **need** to have a safe and orderly environment,” says Principal Boyd.

Since the disruptive behavior they were seeing in a growing number of students was likely linked to significant stress, including family and community issues related to the pandemic, Boyd knew that improving the trauma-informed aspects of their programs would be key to giving everyone an opportunity to thrive.

Edgewood invited Wellpoint to create a custom-tailored training to enhance their school's unique approach to education — including a revised version of their existing discipline protocol, developed using a trauma-sensitive lens.

MORE PROACTIVE, LESS REACTIVE

Prior to training with Wellpoint, Principal Boyd says Edgewood staff knew children needed support and empathy when exhibiting signs of dysregulation, not of punishment. But, the interventions they knew were mostly *reactive* — after dysregulation had already impacted behavior.

“We were using tools like removing kids from class to cool down and then talking with them to reflect on what had happened,” says Boyd. “Proactive strategies had been more limited, and were mostly only for the kids who had an Individualized Education Program.”

Today, Edgewood’s teachers are equipped with proactive strategies to support all students’ self-regulation, like breaks and movement activities to help adjust energy levels. “Now, we’re able to start using these techniques **before** the problems start happening.”

New rhythm- and movement-based activities help kids transition between energy levels and respond to changes in students’ sensory loads. “Being mindful of energy levels over the course of the day can make a big difference.”

“We’re not dealing with the same problems over and over again.”

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES

The training has given the teachers and staff a new toolset and shifted how they approach their work and daily interactions. “That has become language we use with each other,” says Principal Boyd. “We’re more aware of students’ sensory needs, as well as our own.”

Teachers use regulation techniques to respond to emerging needs and plan transitions throughout the day. Now, when a teacher senses her kindergarteners becoming energetic or distracted, rhythm activities can channel that energy and return them to a calmer, more focused place.

When two students recently started having problems in class, teachers began using relational check-ins to give them more opportunities to talk with adults outside of teaching interactions. Disruptive behaviors have noticeably decreased since implementing these strategies.

Edgewood staff recognize that their new approach will also have results down the road. Instead of waiting until students show signs of distress, they are using a proactive approach whenever challenges present themselves in a student’s life. And, they now have tools to provide more effective support to those students.

LEARNING CAREGIVER CAPACITY

New challenges like Covid-19 have increased the need for trauma-informed strategies at school. Many students have experienced stress and trauma as a direct result of the pandemic, including housing instability, financial strain and caregiver stress.

**“You have to start with *yourself*.
If you’re not regulated, you
cannot help *someone else*.”**

Having a better understanding of trauma and sensory loads, with more strategies to handle them, has also been important for staff and faculty managing their own stress.

“The negative effects of trauma can be mediated when you’re in a supportive, regulated environment,” says Boyd.

“It’s our job as adults to establish that. **No one** can learn until that happens.”

To learn more about Wellpoint Care Network’s work with K-12 schools, visit wellpoint.org/k12.



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