

## Everett Area Elementary School

427 East South Street

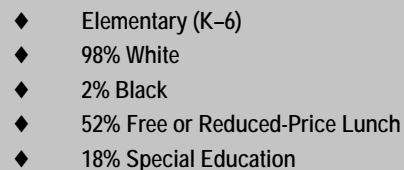
Everett, PA 15537

Principal: Shawn L. Kovac

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In 2006, Everett Area Elementary School was the beneficiary of a grant to Bedford County Unified Family Services Systems from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to implement programs to promote a positive and healthy learning environment in the school and to reduce behavior problems. The goals of this grant are

to promote protective factors (such as social-emotional skills) and reduce risk factors (such as negative peer influence) for alcohol and drug abuse and aggressive behavior. The grant targeted elementary schools to make an impact on students before they reach the middle school years, when children most typically begin to engage in risky and delinquent behaviors. The model implemented in Bedford County was an adaptation of the Seattle Social Development Project and the Raising Healthy Children Project. The developers of the original models provided support to the school in the form of training and coaching.

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- ◆ Elementary (K-6)
  - ◆ 98% White
  - ◆ 2% Black
  - ◆ 52% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
  - ◆ 18% Special Education

### Social-Emotional Skills Training

The school addresses social and emotional learning in all grades by focusing on the development of interpersonal and problem-solving skills. There are several ways in which the school integrates its social-emotional learning goals across all grade levels. Throughout the school, posters declare that all students and teachers have *Rights*, but must always show *Respect*, and fulfill their *Responsibilities*. The students explain that they have rights, such as the right to learn without disruptions; they also know they must always show respect to their teachers and fellow students, and with these rights come responsibilities to respond appropriately, engage in learning, and complete their assignments. Teachers are always expected to model these behaviors.

In Everett's classrooms, students have the opportunity to be "problem solvers or problem keepers." As a problem solver, the student completes a small slip of paper where he or she can note a particular behavior problem, various solutions, and their corresponding consequences. Then the student picks a solution. Teachers want to be able to demonstrate that they value everything a student wants to share, but they also recognize that there is not always time for students to share as much as they would like. When this occurs, students write their "conversation topic" on a sticky note and post it in the Parking Lot. When there are a few extra minutes, the teacher can then choose a sticky note and provide the student an opportunity to share.

The classrooms are decorated with the intention to promote a supportive and healthy classroom environment. Students don't "put down" their classmates; rather, they post sticky notes on the "put-up board" when they want to commend a fellow student for a

positive behavior or action. Teachers also create displays and initiate activities to help students feel bonded and connected to the school. For example, one teacher displays students' baby pictures.

Starting in first grade, all teachers integrate social-emotional skills instruction into the curriculum. Teachers also use two specific curricula: one for kindergartners (The Incredible Years) and one for sixth graders (Skills for Life). In kindergarten, the curriculum uses puppets. Teachers present the lessons in a 10–20 minute circle time followed by small group activities. The major themes of the program are: making new friends and learning school rules, understanding and identifying their feelings, problem-solving skills, and socializing with peers. For example, visitors may see students talking to Wally or Molly, who are their puppet friends. Periodically, Wally or Molly visit the classroom to help the students learn about feelings and ways to express their feelings. After the puppets go back to their home, students may “fish” for feelings in the “Feelings Pond” and talk about a time when they felt happy, sad, angry, etc. Teachers at Everett feel the students can more easily express their feelings to the puppets, which seem to be less intimidating than a teacher, counselor, or other adults in the school.

In sixth grade, teachers implement Skills for Life. Students engage in lessons that can help them withstand risky or illegal behaviors. To learn the facts about smoking, students participate in a game show called “Smoking: Myths and Realities,” holding up placards that say either “No Way” or “For Real” in response to questions from the teacher, who assumes the role of game show host. Intermittently, a student serving as the commercial announcer provides interesting and little-known facts about smoking. Activities such as this engage students and teach them life skills to better prepare them for adolescence. Another lesson may focus on media messages to help students discern the hidden messages, both positive and negative, which are transmitted through such media as television, movies, and the Internet.

### **Proactive Classroom Management**

A second component of Everett's programs is proactive classroom management. Proactive classroom management strategies include:

1. clear classroom routines and transitions,
2. an organized learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging,
3. increased time on task,
4. activities to keep students engaged in learning even when assigned work is completed (sponge activities), and
5. management of behavior problems in a manner that does not disrupt instruction (Law of Least Intervention).

Everett teachers implement these strategies in a coherent approach to managing classroom behaviors. The classrooms are organized so students know where to access materials. Teachers seek to minimize time between activities. For example, students are assigned “jobs,” which are done efficiently and independently. In this way, the teachers do not need to use instructional time to complete “housekeeping” jobs such as the lunch count. Each classroom has a Homework Chart, which students can consult

without having to ask repeatedly, "What's the homework?" Teachers also post a daily schedule and the standards being addressed in the lessons. Students know the objective of the lesson and the schedule for the daily activities.

Students are engaged in guided practice during transitions to maximize time on task. Each new activity begins with an "anticipatory set." These are short, focused activities that students are asked to complete during transitions such as in the morning when school starts, after lunch, and/or after recess. Anticipatory sets consume just the right amount of time to allow students to settle down when entering the classroom.

Classrooms are organized to foster a sense of belonging. Teachers display student academic and artistic work products to demonstrate that all students make contributions to the classroom and to learning. Some teachers highlight a student of the week or post baby pictures to help students get to know their classmates better. Teachers also try to recognize students' efforts through explicit feedback to note individuals' strengths and efforts in classroom behavior and in learning.

Increasing time on task is an important goal for all teachers at Everett. Students are expected to arrive in class ready to learn. Teachers pace instruction to move quickly from one activity to another.

Each classroom has a dedicated space for "sponge activities." Sponge activities soak up extra time when students finish an assigned task; students select an activity from a menu of choices posted at the table and work independently to complete the activity while other students finish their work. Teachers routinely change the activities at the table to provide independent practice aligned to current areas of skill development. For example, if students are learning to use verb tenses correctly, they might find a worksheet or puzzle they can complete for additional practice. When students know exactly what they can do after they complete an assignment, they stay engaged in learning, do not bother classmates, or engage in disruptive behavior.

Teachers manage classroom behavior through the principle of the "Law of Least Intervention." This means teachers are trained to respond to the behavior in a way that does not call attention to it and draw all the students' attention away from their academic activities. Often, just pausing for a moment and looking at a student can mitigate the offending behavior, such as talking to a classmate. If the behavior continues, the teacher puts a check on the "Best Foot Forward" chart and then if necessary, the teacher can issue a private warning to the student. This set of steps helps teachers avoid calling attention to the behavior before the whole class thus diverting the other students' attention from the lesson. The behavior expectations are clear and consistent across all classrooms; students know and can articulate the rules and the consequences.

By using these proactive management strategies, the teachers establish a positive learning environment where students know how to behave, what the expectations are, and how to work independently. Students are active participants in managing the classroom and learn to transition to new activities quickly and to focus on their responsibilities and on learning.

## Engaging Instructional Strategies

The third component to Everett's schoolwide approach focuses on instruction. Teachers receive extensive professional development on the implementation of strategies that foster and maintain positive classroom behavior and active student engagement, such as cooperative learning. Teachers learn how to prepare students for cooperative learning activities and how to organize these activities to maintain positive behavior and interaction among classmates. For example, fourth-grade teacher Kelly Waugerman sets up a cooperative learning activity by placing a playing card on each student's desk. Students form groups by their card number. Once students are in their groups, each one has a role. The recorder notes the group's responses; another student acts as the facilitator who is responsible for materials and time; and a third student is the reporter. When the whole class regroups together, the reporter shares each group's responses.

On another day, the teacher may choose groups by randomly selecting students. Teachers write students' names on Popsicle sticks or tongue depressors and select sticks from a cup to form groups or to call on students in class. Everett's teachers feel it's important to teach students to work cooperatively with all classmates and to have a definitive role in completing the target activity. They want students to learn to work in teams in much the same way as they may be expected to do as adults. As such, teachers consider cooperative learning an important component of social development.

As part of the school's approach, teachers are encouraged to prepare students for learning and to help them display behavior that indicates readiness to learn. To this end, teachers seek to align activities with objectives, help students build on existing knowledge, check for understanding, monitor student responses, and model the correct answers. At times, when students are leaving the classroom, they leave an exit ticket at the door with the teacher; this may be a note card or post-it note where the student summarizes a key idea from the lesson or an idea learned by the student in that day's lesson.

Teachers use a variety of strategies to keep students motivated and engaged. Often, teachers use signals: "Pull on your earlobe if you understand the directions," or "Shake your head if you need additional directions." Students also have frequent opportunities to move. For example, a teacher may invite the class to stand up by saying, "Everyone who thinks the answer is correct, stand up." Students have wipe-off laminated sentence strips and are asked to note their responses individually while the teacher selects a stick to randomly call on one student. In this way, all students are accountable to respond. Teachers punctuate these responses with positive feedback even if the answer is incorrect or the student does not know how to respond. Teachers may say, "I like the way you thought about an answer." The praise is positive and specific.

Teachers make clear connections to practical matters and to students' lives. They feel connecting learning to real-world examples helps students engage in learning, alleviates boredom, and sparks interest. For example, when students learn how to form past tense verbs, they are also provided a real-world example of why it is important to learn to speak and use past tense verbs correctly: "When you go to a job interview, you are going to be asked to talk about your past experiences. To do that, you will need to use a variety of verbs correctly in the past tense."

There are also a number of charts and centers in the classrooms to help students work independently and seek assistance with their work. In this way, students build confidence and learn to take greater responsibility for their learning. For example, there is a Writing Table; when students are working on a writing assignment, they can go to the table and see examples of effective writing.

### **Parent Education Program**

Everett has a Family Support Coordinator who organizes and facilitates the parent education workshops. Workshop goals are designed to help families implement behavior management strategies at home, initiate strong family communication, and support parents in establishing home learning routines. There are three parent programs: Supporting School Success (for parent of K–3 students), Raising Healthy Children (for parents of K–3 students), and Guiding Good Choices (for parents of students ages 9–14 years old). Supporting School Success focuses on initiating conversation with teachers on children’s learning, helping children develop basic skills in reading and math, developing home learning routines, and fostering strong communications with their children.

Raising Healthy Children encompasses learning skills to help parents identify desirable and undesirable child behaviors, teaching behavior expectations, and guiding parents in responding with appropriate consequences for misbehaviors.

Parents of sixth-grade students may choose to attend the Guiding Good Choices parent education programs. These programs help parents to work with their children to create opportunities for the children to contribute to the family, to use self-control skills to reduce conflict in the home, to establish a no-use family policy on drugs, and to practice refusal skills. For example, in an interactive workshop, parents role-play refusal skills with their children. The children practice alternative responses when invited by peers to engage in a risky behavior such as shoplifting. They learn to name the behavior: “That’s illegal,” and to suggest an alternative activity: “We can watch a movie instead.” Such activities awaken parents to the potential problems their children may face and provide a ready answer for the children to counteract the request.

### **Collaborative Relationships**

Teachers participate in staff development to learn the approach and work collaboratively to implement it. Training focuses on the implementation of the key components: implementing proactive classroom management, using engaging instructional strategies, and providing social and emotional skills training.

After implementation begins, the principal selects peer coaches who receive additional training on coaching, the implementation of the approach, and peer observations. The peer coaches work closely with three to four teachers to observe instruction and provide feedback on their implementation. Coaches have dedicated release time throughout the year to observe and meet with their peers. They use a structured form to guide the observations. In this way, all teachers learn to refine the delivery of instruction, use a common language, and implement consistent strategies across all classrooms. Coaching also helps the school develop the capacity to continue the program beyond the grant funding.

**TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More**

Since Everett began implementing these programs, the principal and teachers feel the entire atmosphere of the school has changed. Gradually, these programs have positively affected the school climate: in 2005–06, there were 420 referrals; in 2006–07, referrals were down to 290. In 2007–08, there were only 160 referrals. Suspensions have also markedly decreased from 72 in 2005–06 to 23 in 2008–09 (through March 2009). Students stay in classrooms actively engaged in learning. The staff note that students are comfortable in school, enjoy learning, and feel a sense of belonging. Teachers work with peers through staff development and coaching. They use a common language and implement consistent classroom management strategies. At the beginning of each school year, teachers no longer need to devote weeks of instructional time training students in expectations and classroom routines and rituals. The children know exactly what to expect in each classroom and can immediately focus on learning from the first day of a new school year. Teachers work with students, families, and the community to form a TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More.