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The Supportive Classroom

WFEE awarded The Supportive Classroom grant to Ambrose Elementary School to allow the faculty to participate in workshops introducing them to a curriculum model for creating safe and supportive learning environments. The curriculum facilitates the development of trust, sharing, belonging, responsibility and respect among community members.

Chantal Olson, WFEE Board member, recently had the chance to talk to the grant applicants, Lisa McManus, Principal, and Anne Harrison, 2nd grade teacher about the impact the grant has made on the Ambrose community.

CO: How did you find out about The Supportive Classroom and why was it important to bring it to the school?

LM: After introducing the Anti-Bullying program at Ambrose, which outlined unacceptable behaviors and clear consequences, we introduced the Tree of Kindness to reward individual positive behavior. But we recognized the need to make positive behavior a more integral part of what we do. This is when Anne introduced me to The Supportive Classroom.

AH: When I taught in Vermont, we had an anti-bullying program and we used The Responsive Classroom philosophy. Building on that philosophy, we learned about The Supportive Classroom program at University of Vermont. When I started working at Ambrose last year, I brought the program to Lisa's attention and we applied for the grant.

CO: What are some of the positive outcomes as a result of implementing the program?

LM: Given that we are dealing with many changes (a new school, significant student population growth and many new teachers), it was very important for us to build a cohesive community. During the summer 75% of our teachers participated in the first workshop, where they learned to connect the concept to the curriculum. It allowed us to build a common language for the teachers and the students to communicate about how they are feeling about their interactions with each other. Teachers say that the children connect better than ever. I have noticed that there are much fewer incidents that need my intervention.

AH: The program has an amazing effect on the students. There are less behavior issues, better group discussions, more outreach by the students and a general openness. This has allowed for better social and emotional connections and once these are in place, the academic success follows.

CO: How will you make sure The Supportive Classroom remains an important part of the curriculum once the "novelty" has worn off?

LM: Our workshops end next March, but we are already working on ways to share knowledge and resources within the school. We have created a teacher binder which serves as a resource for lessons incorporating our learning. The library will have a special section dedicated to The Supportive Classroom with books that can facilitate learning. For example "When Sophie Gets Angry-Really, Really Angry..." by Molly Bang teaches about feelings.

AH: Once you have gone through the training, it becomes embedded-it is your way of teaching!



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