

Programs

Goal #3: Develop systems, structures, and frameworks to support early primary and middle school student transitions.

What Went Well

Over the past four years, we have worked consistently to establish the *what*, of what we do. **Success and Connection** and **Opportunity and Access** are the foundation of every decision we make from people and programs, to finance and facilities. From our partnership with Luzerne and BU to our growing work in alternative placements, what we do prioritizes student outcomes. The *Why*, to create the conditions for generational change is our essential outcome and the central tenet of Goal #3. For true generational change to be a realistic outcome in a school with diverse socio-economic backgrounds as we have in Bloomsburg, our early primary and middle school transitions are key points in our students' growth. The development and implementation of our K-8 guidance curriculum and the creation of our 6th grade academy reflect a focus on creating a foundation in social and mental health that can allow our students, regardless of circumstances, the opportunity to thrive in our academic programs. We have created significant opportunities for students in our high school to transform their access to economic and intellectual mobility. It is essential that as we move forward, we judge our successes on the students from vulnerable populations who have a chance to experience these opportunities.

Our elementary guidance program is a unique opportunity for our students to learn the habits of mind essential for strong academic, social and physical growth. With our counselors meeting all of our students and learning about them in the classroom environment, we have an opportunity to establish relationships and connections that endure and can support our children and our families in a time of crisis. The ability to include our elementary supervisor of special education and a guidance counselor dedicated to working with students from our most vulnerable populations on a daily basis, provides an additional layer of connections and interventions for our students and families most in need. Our administrative team and teachers are passionate, fierce and tireless advocates for our kids. Though only fully implemented for a short time, when we had to modify our model due to staffing shortages, the impact was obvious across the elementary and secondary programs. We are grateful for the restoration of the secondary supervisor position.

In a similar fashion our 6th grade academy, implemented this fall after several years in the planning stages, is designed to provide proactive intervention for our students as they make life and school transitions. Although this school year has been like none other we have experienced, the cohort model is showing initial signs of allowing students to make new connections and form strong bonds with other students who may have come from a different elementary school. The shift to a block schedule and the ability to dedicate a guidance counselor to the 6th grade team has shown initial potential and has yielded early reports of lowering student stress levels. In a sense, goal #3 is really about establishing the proactive intervention and supports necessary to not quite level the playing field for students in vulnerable populations or who may be at-risk for academic or social difficulties, but to provide a fighting chance for the success and connection that frames our work.

Limitations

Our recurring theme regarding limitations is the constant shifting in personnel. In the spring, we thought we had established extremely strong elementary and secondary student support services teams, including staffing of the 6th grade academy. Resignations from our secondary special education supervisor and an elementary guidance counselor necessitated shifts in both administrative and guidance roles and responsibilities.

While we have worked hard in these reflections to avoid blaming our limitations on the pandemic, necessary shifts in our elementary intervention staff and our 6th grade academy to support both our in-person homerooms

at the elementary level and our Blended program at the secondary level limits our ability to fully realize the potential benefits of our approach to student transitions. To say that we are apprehensive about how state-funding implications resulting from the pandemic could influence our staffing for next year would be an understatement. There has been recent talk of Federal Funding for next year that could ease this apprehension.

Moving Forward

As an organization, we believe that we have our priorities in line—a focus on creating the conditions for our students to feel **successful and connected** so that they have **opportunity and access** to true generational change. We like the design of our systems, structures and frameworks and could not be more pleased with the energy and enthusiasm of our faculty and staff for taking on this important work. Now, we seek stability in these systems, structures and frameworks so that our people have the opportunity to use them to thrive.

As we face the challenges presented to us in the unprecedented times, our essential work as administrators is to advocate for the essential nature of providing the student support services and proactive interventions necessary for our students from vulnerable populations and who are at-risk for academic and social difficulties. We have set aside our district field days and family fun zone in the name of safety... the types of activities that can engage students' hearts and imagination of *what can be*. We cannot lose sight of the fundamental human need for connection and belonging that these types of moments create not only for our kids but for our faculty, staff and administration as well. When the time comes, we have to remember the joy of connection, of truly being part of something greater than ourselves and restore these ever so abstract, but even more so meaningful experiences.

Beyond data points and dollar signs, we find individual kids with real families who have hopes and dreams for a future that is ever more challenging to understand. If our school can provide even the smallest spark to ignite the passion, interest and enthusiasm of our kids and by extension our community, our work will have true meaning and value.