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Wisconsin Social and Emotional Learning Case Study: Adams-Friendship

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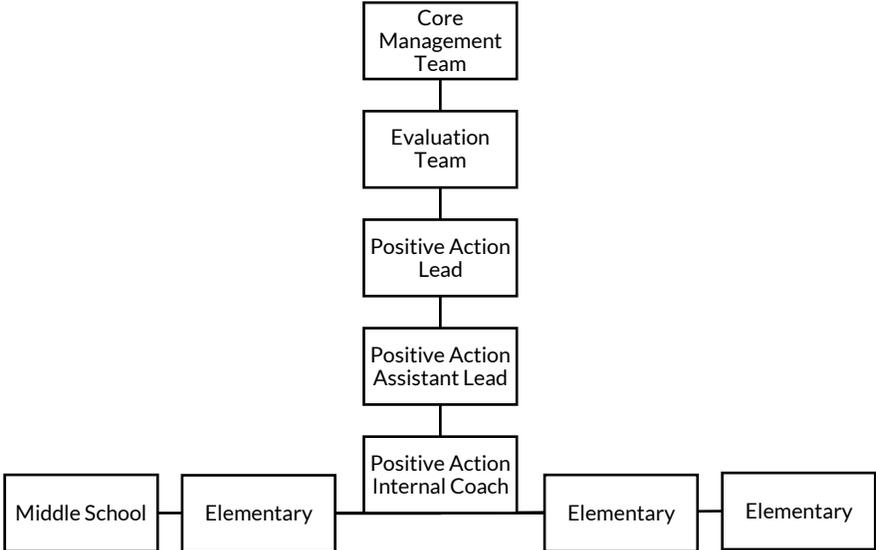
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Introduction

Adams-Friendship Area Schools is a K-12 rural district encompassing 550 square miles. Concerns regarding child and youth mental and behavioral health resulted in the formation of a community coalition in 2011. This coalition received grant funding to develop a plan to address these concerns. Community and school partners recognized that students of all ages were lacking in basic personal interaction skills. These skill deficits manifested in disrespectful behavior that was impacting academic success, and creating student conflicts which were observed in school and community settings. The community coalition plan included explicitly teaching social and emotional learning (SEL) skills.

THE MODEL



Adams-Friendship began implementing the Positive Action Curriculum in grades K-8 in 2015. The program provides teachers with 15-minute scripted lessons and supplementary kits that include drug education and anti-bullying lessons. The district has a Positive Action Lead Coach and an Assistant Lead Coach. It is their role to monitor district-wide implementation of the curriculum and action plan, and track progress. Each building has an internal Positive Action Coach who is a

classroom teacher who agrees to take on the extra responsibility. The internal coach provides training, leadership, evaluation, and peer support to ensure that the Positive Action Curriculum is implemented with fidelity across the school.

Application of skills learned occurs through the district “Word of the Week” process. Across the district, an SEL word of the week is chosen. This word guides activities and provides an opportunity for students to be recognized for using skills associated with the word. The Evaluation Team is developing a plan to work with community partners and area businesses. This plan will encourage local businesses to share the word of the week so that students can be recognized for their behavior outside of school, and to display signs connected to the skills learned in Positive Action.

THE PLAYERS

Adams-Friendship began with a community coalition which expanded as the result of additional grant funding from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration. This Core Management Team is the advisory body that oversees the school/community mental health collaborative work. Members include the Adams County Health and Human Services, the community hospital, workforce development, the local day treatment program, local clergy, and the county corporation council that responds to school truancy.

Internally, the district Evaluation Team developed the structure of the SEL work, reviews data to inform planning and implementation, and monitors training and curriculum implementation by staff. The Evaluation Team is staffed by pupil services staff, PBIS Leads, and Positive Action Coaches. The classroom teacher, in addition to teaching the curriculum and reinforcing the student application of SEL skills, connect with parents/guardians to share the SEL work being done in the school so that families can support the skills at home. Student voice is captured in the student led Expect Respect Team, which creates challenge activities for their peers around the “Word of the Week.”

Big Ideas from Adams-Friendship

INSTRUCTION

In addition to regular SEL lessons, Adams-Friendship recognized the importance of aligning their SEL work with other districtwide initiatives. Braiding SEL with the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) work has been essential to the buy-in from staff who see SEL as a support for PBIS rather than a competing project. SEL skills are part of the behavioral expectations taught to students, and they are recognized for using those skills when they receive an “I See You” slip.

Social and Emotional Learning is a piece of the district’s youth mental health work; it is not a stand-alone program. Along with SEL, the district is addressing student trauma and restorative practices, all universal strategies to support student mental health.

Adams-Friendship learned that in order to have an impact, SEL efforts have to be coordinated at the district level rather than merely at the school level, and staff need coaching to build capacity and expertise.

ADULT

All 4k-8 staff have been trained in the Positive Action curriculum. Positive Action coaches train all new staff coming on board. Ongoing training is provided throughout the school year and teachers are able to request additional support from their building coaches. This support may include preparing lessons, offering observations, providing feedback, and/or finding additional materials.

Adams-Friendship is also working to support staff so that they are able to bring their best SEL skills to their work. Their teams are beginning to look at strategies and supports to address staff wellness, respond to compassion fatigue, and foster adult resilience.

SUSTAINABILITY

Adams-Friendship began the work with sustainability in mind. While grant funding has provided resources to begin the work, they have created a plan that incrementally reduces the dollars needed to implement and sustain it. Their mental health and social and emotional learning efforts have been supported by a large community collaboration, they have integrated the SEL work into existing district priorities and initiatives, they have an action plan that includes training of new staff, and they are beginning to engage families. All these strategies lay the foundation for the sustainability of the efforts.

EQUITY

Adams-Friendship is a homogeneous community with a high rate of poverty. 68.2% of students receive free and reduced price lunch. Focusing social and emotional learning efforts at the universal level ensures all children have access to these essential skills.

What have the outcomes been?

- Reduction in the number of suspensions and expulsions
- A systemic approach for tracking and responding to student behaviors
- Inclusion of student voice and participation
- Developing youth leadership skills
- Students taking social and emotional learning concepts into their homes and communities
- Students being recognized for positive actions

How are things different for kids?

- A more respectful and safe school climate
- Students have the language skills necessary to problem solve and resolve conflicts
- More time for academic instruction
- Students are active participants in creating the positive school climate