



CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHT

Meaningfully Connecting with Particular Students of Concern

Forming meaningful connections is crucial to facilitating healthy growth and development in your students. While important with all students, forming meaningful connections is especially important with students who are at the greatest risk in our schools. Effective teaching involves addressing both academic and non-academic barriers to learning, such as exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma.

Students with high ACE scores or who are experiencing trauma tend to be at the greatest risk for school failure and suicidal ideation. One of the most important protective factors for these students is a close connection with at least one trusted, caring adult. By establishing meaningful connections as a teacher, you may become a lifeline for one or more of your students.

Forming meaningful connections, or building rapport, involves interacting with your students in a way that reflects you care about them as individuals. The key to establishing rapport with students of concern is gaining their trust by showing that your intentions and actions have their best interests in mind. This can be much easier said than done. Building this level of connection with a student of particular concern—who on the surface may appear to lack enthusiasm about school or forming a connection with you as their teacher—requires strategic thinking and action.

The basics of building rapport requires positive interactions over time. This may occur quickly for you with many of your students. However, this may not be the case with a student who is experiencing non-academic barriers to learning. In these instances, it is important to plan ahead for 1) the mechanics (steps) in building rapport and 2) when and how often to apply these steps with a student.

Let's first start with the following steps on how to build rapport with a student of concern:

- 1** Demonstrate close proximity (e.g., move toward the student within arm's reach).
- 2** Demonstrate appropriate touch (e.g., hand on the shoulder).
- 3** Demonstrate appropriate facial expressions (e.g., reflect the emotion of the situation).
- 4** Demonstrate appropriate tone of voice (e.g., match voice to situation).
- 5** Demonstrate appropriate body language (e.g., relaxed, arms open, attentive, looking at student).
- 6** Ask open-ended, positive questions, ideally based on student interests (e.g., These may begin with "Tell me about..." or "Why do you think...?")
- 7** Listen while the student is speaking. Ideally, talk less than the student. Do not interrupt or abruptly change the topic when the student is engaged.
- 8** Demonstrate the use of reflective listening and empathy statements (act like a mirror and reflect the student's feelings, express understanding, caring, etc.).
- 9** Ignore inconsequential/nuisance/junk behavior.
- 10** Look calm, cool, and collected throughout the interaction.

It would be nice if repeating these steps once or twice created a meaningful connection with a particular student of concern, but it is not quite that simple. The noted steps are only part of the actions that you will need to take over time. Be strategic in looking for opportunities to implement these steps throughout the ebb and flow of the typical school day. It can feel awkward at first; your particular student may not be someone who naturally gives you a lot of positive feedback.

The rapport-building steps noted above can be delivered within brief windows of time, using brief non-instructional blocks of time in the classroom (typically between 15 to 30 seconds). This does not suggest that having longer positive interactions are not encouraged. The key to making a meaningful connection however, is in the frequency rather than duration of positive interactions. You are encouraged to identify these brief windows of time throughout the school day that allow you easy access to interact with the student. These brief windows include transitions such as entering or leaving the classroom, or in-between instructional activities throughout the day. Building these brief interactions around student interests is beneficial.

Rapport is built on trust, which needs to be earned. Building meaningful connections with particular students requires persistence, thus repeating the previously noted steps across a variety of situations. The amount of time it will take will vary from student to student. Some students who initially appear distant may respond in only a short time to your rapport-building efforts while others may make you work longer to earn their trust. Your students will let you connect with them, but they will do this on their own time-frame, based on when they feel they can trust you.

The keys to forming meaningful connections with students that appear difficult-to-reach include: 1) being systematic in applying the steps and 2) being strategic as to when and where you apply these steps along with your own patience and persistence. It is essential to build rapport with each student in your classroom. Rapport will grow organically for you with many of your students. However, there will be students who will require you to work longer and harder to establish a meaningful connection. You can reach every student and each one is deserving of your professional effort.

What Educators Say About the PDE Endorsement in Social Emotional Behavioral Wellness PK-12 Students

In 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) established the Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Wellness (SEBW) Endorsement for PK-12 Students. The endorsement prepares educators to "build resiliency in students by facilitating SEBW in order to address non-academic barriers to learning" (PDE, 2018). Candidates who have earned a Level I or II instructional, supervisory, educational specialist, or administrative certificate are able to complete the endorsement program and add it to their instructional certificate. As of February 2022 in Pennsylvania, a small number of institutions of higher education (IHEs) who operate educator preparatory programs were approved to offer this endorsement; Bloomsburg University being one of the first.

Historically, limited training in SEBW has been embedded in educator preparation programs. When teachers are trauma-informed they can better support their students and

contribute to a positive school climate. Therefore, there is a critical need for trauma-informed practice training and professional development at both the pre and in-service levels.

In Spring 2021, Bloomsburg University's first cohort of 13 educators completed the sequence and became eligible to add this endorsement to their Level I or II PA teaching certificates. There are currently 60 undergraduate and graduate/non-degree students (in-service teachers) working through this sequence at BU. The course work for educators in the field is completely online and culminates with an internship that can be completed in context of their current position.

To learn more about this endorsement, aspiring educators at BU can contact Dr. Stephanie Gardner (sgardner@bloomu.edu) and current educators in the field can contact Dr. Robin Drogan (rdrogan@bloomu.edu).

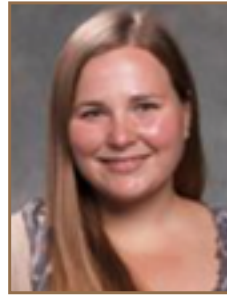
The following highlights the value of this endorsement as described by a few of the first educators to complete the course sequence:



Allison Wislock



Kora Murphy



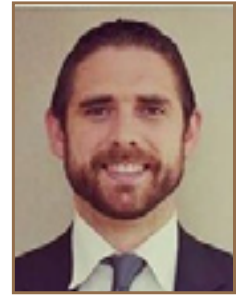
Meghan Schoonmaker



Meghan Deitterick



Miranda Fawyer



Russell Watkins

What initially interested you in pursuing the PDE endorsement in SEBW of PK-12 Students?

"The endorsement allowed me to learn more as an early childhood education consultant. I knew the need for social, emotional, and behavior wellness guidance was significant in our local educational settings; it is the foundation of success." —**Meghan Deitterick**

"When I saw that there was this program to address non-academic barriers to learning and to connect with students' emotional and behavioral needs, I was like 'YES!'; so the endorsement was a great option for me." —**Miranda Fawver**

"When I heard about SPECED 480/580: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools and how it focused on interacting with a lot of different students from different backgrounds, it interested me. I wanted a lot of strategies that focused on mental health and that's what this endorsement gave me." —**Kora Murphy**

"The social, emotional, behavioral needs of my students are my top priorities, especially due to COVID! Behavior and engagement in schools is one of the biggest challenges that we face as educators." —**Russell Watkins**

What particular aspect, or aspects, of trauma-informed practice associated with this endorsement have you found most helpful with your students?

"Two particular aspects that I most appreciated were reducing the mental health stigma in our local communities and exploring SEL curriculums we can utilize within educational environments. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to explore and use the resources and information shared in the program." —**Meghan Deitterick**

"Probably the most important thing we talked about in our endorsement classes was building relationships and rapport. It's all about knowing what works with each kid." —**Kora Murphy**

"Trauma-informed practice has allowed me to better understand that students are doing their best. It has helped me to further develop empathy and patience when helping students through social, academic, or emotional rough patches. I am better able to understand antecedents and functions of behavior and to consider the best ways to help a student through difficulties." —**Megan Schoonmaker**

"I found learning about ACEs very helpful and learning that our students can build resiliency with help from us as educators was particularly important. I also learned about the different types of trauma and how it can affect a child all the way through adulthood." —**Allison Wislock**

How has your participation in completing the courses associated with this endorsement helped you in meeting the needs of your students?

"Sharing the knowledge I have gained, and empowering others has the potential to have limitless positive impacts on our communities for years to come. As an educational consultant, I support educators in supporting students, families, and one another. The opportunities to learn more regarding human development, trauma-informed practices, and linking assessments to instruction have been extremely valuable while guiding professionals and programs in best practices." —**Meghan Deitterick**

"It has helped me tremendously. It has allowed me to connect with my students, and to create strategies to implement throughout the school day for students who become overwhelmed, frustrated, or anxious." —**Miranda Fawver**

"I am now better able to apply basic strategies and tier 1 supports to help with student behaviors. I am also better able to see where our team (8th grade) and district may be able to make improvements in order to see positive results for students and build a stronger sense of community." —**Megan Schoonmaker**

What advice would you share with others who might be interested in pursuing the endorsement?

"Thanks to this program I feel confident in my ability to encourage educators to support the social, emotional, and behavioral wellness of those they teach and serve. I am confident that anyone who participates in the program will feel more prepared to support others and understand themselves in the area of social, emotional, and behavior wellness. This program not only links directly to education, but to our everyday lives as human beings."

—Meghan Deitterick

"The program highlights really important information on trauma and increases your awareness of how your own experiences have impacted you. It also helps you develop the skills to navigate your own experiences so you can be there 100% for your students."

—Miranda Fawver

"Students are so much more than who they are in front of us in the classroom. There are many things to consider when designing a lesson, when speaking to a group or individual student, and when it comes to de-escalating a situation

that could be volatile. Understanding basic student needs should come before the academic pieces, because students who do not feel safe and connected will not experience the level of learning that their peers enjoy."

—Megan Schoonmaker

"The endorsement really helps you to dive in and learn about the different moving parts in your own school district that can help to address the social and emotional needs of your students."

—Allison Wislock

Special thanks to our Husky Alumni for sharing their experiences, insights, and advice. You make us proud!

Using the Pennsylvania Youth Survey to Build Capacity in Schools

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) provides valuable information to schools concerning the social, emotional and behavioral wellness of their students. School systems conduct this survey with their 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders to learn about their behavior, attitudes, and knowledge concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and violence. The PAYS also provides information about school climate and safety (especially around bullying) as well as the impact of the pandemic on students. It also reports more specific detail about protective factors that can be used to help prevent exposure to adverse experiences as well as, mitigate the effects of those experiences.

Here are just a few paraphrased examples of the types of survey questions from across just a few domains of items reflected in the PAYS:

- On how many occasions (if any) have you used alcohol, marijuana, or electronic vapor products (e.g., JUUL, Vuse, MarkTen, and blu or other e-cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, e-cigars, e-hookahs, hookah pens, and mods) during the past 30 days?
- During the past 12 months, have you been bullied through texting and/or social media?

- In the past 12 months, how often have you been threatened to be hit or beaten up on school property?
- During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?
- During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

The PAYS is voluntary for school districts and is sponsored and conducted every two years by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Over 80% of school districts across the commonwealth engaged in the PAYS in the fall of 2021. Reports from this administration will be provided to participating school districts in the late spring of 2022. The McDowell Institute has collaborated with regional partners in the Social Emotional Wellness Community of Practice (SEW CoP) to support local school districts in the five-county region in which BU is located to interpret their PAYS data to create action plans to help their students. While action plans are unique to each school system, there are a few common themes that typically are reflected across school district action plans in the region.

EXAMPLES OF COMMON THEMES

Professional Development

Typical topics that tend to emerge through strategic planning tend to emphasize ongoing training for faculty and staff in trauma-informed practices, youth suicide prevention-gatekeeper training, and positive behavior support. Professional development in these areas tends to be situated within new hire induction programs in concert with training for current faculty and staff across schools within districts.

Social-Emotional Learning

Given there is a vast array of social-emotional learning curricula available to schools, guidance is provided concerning the selection and implementation of these curricula across schools within districts. The greatest emphasis is placed on the formal adoption of evidence-based programs (e.g., Positive Action, Second Step, Botvin Life Skills). However, where relevant, technical assistance is provided to enhance the implementation of existent locally developed curricula.

Screening for Social-Emotional Wellness

In alignment with supports provided concerning social-emotional learning, guidance is provided concerning the installation of, at a minimum, universal screening for social-emotional wellness. Further, technical assistance is provided concerning gated youth suicide risk assessment in concert with building capacity to address the needs of students that surface through the screening process. Relatedly, technical assistance is provided concerning the alignment of screening with operation of the district's required Student Assistance Program (SAP).



Alignment of Multi-tiered Frameworks

While it is important to note the emphasis on evidence-based programs and practices, it is further important to situate such approaches within multi-tiered frameworks that organize support to faculty and staff to implement those programs and practices with fidelity. To this end, ongoing guidance is provided across schools to organize their work within a multi-tiered framework (e.g., the PBIS framework). Further, schools are supported to align their activities of their SAP with their multi-tiered framework (PBIS).

Adult/Staff Self-care

A common immediate need that typically surfaces across school buildings is that of supporting faculty and staff to meet their own personal needs as they navigate the current state of affairs associated with the pandemic. Supports are provided across schools emphasizing the importance of self-care along with strategies to build and enhance personal resiliency. In tandem, more often than not, varying forms of kindness campaigns

are implemented to help address faculty and staff needs.

The PAYS is valuable as it provides access to valid and reliable community-specific data to inform decision-making at the local level. Questions posed on the PAYS help educators to more fully understand non-academic barriers to learning. Non-academic barriers to learning create particularly unique challenges for educators because they are often resistant to traditional pedagogy (such as well-designed and delivered lessons reflective of the curriculum). Well-designed and delivered instruction is still important; however, it is often insufficient by itself to overcome non-academic barriers to learning such as high degrees of exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that can lead to trauma. Current and aspiring educators are highly encouraged to become familiar with the PAYS. To learn more about the PAYS use this link **HERE** or feel free to contact the McDowell Institute.

What do we mean by the term “Equity” in schools?

Addressing issues of equity in access and opportunity is not a new concept in schools. The topic of equity is garnering greater attention in the field today than in past years. A challenge emerging with this is defining terms like “diversity” and “belonging” and their implications in schools. The following is intended to provide some clarity on a few essential terms to enhance reflection, conversations, and decision-making regarding education. The following definitions align with how the Pennsylvania Department of Education views these important terms and their respective concepts.



Essential Terms	Definitions within Education	General Implications in Schools
Diversity	The range of identities that exist within communities that are reflected in the student population attending any given school.	While this term has traditionally referred to categories of differences such as race and gender, it has increasingly been used to be inclusive of a broader range of identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability). It is important to understand that the term “identity” as reflected in the definition refers to how students identify themselves as well as how others may perceive them as a member of different groups.
Equity	Each and every student having the educational opportunity and timely access to the resources and rigor that they need in order to benefit from their educational experience.	To address this in schools we must embrace the reality that some students may require different or unique resources to access their educational opportunities at a given time. It does NOT mean all students receive the same thing as one another, but rather, each student receives what they need to benefit from their education.
Inclusion	Engagement within the school community where the inherent worth and dignity of each student is respected and honored. It sets the stage for each and every student to acquire a sense of belonging within their school community.	The first step in the process of inclusion is presence in the school community. Mere physical proximity alone is not inclusion. A school climate that celebrates the worth and dignity of each and every student reflects what would be considered an inclusive school.
Belonging	Each and every student experiencing appreciation, validation, acceptance, and fair treatment within their school and community-based learning environments.	Acquiring a sense of belonging is a personalized experience for every student. We need to ensure that students receive the resources and opportunities they need with their peers to make their contribution to the school community.

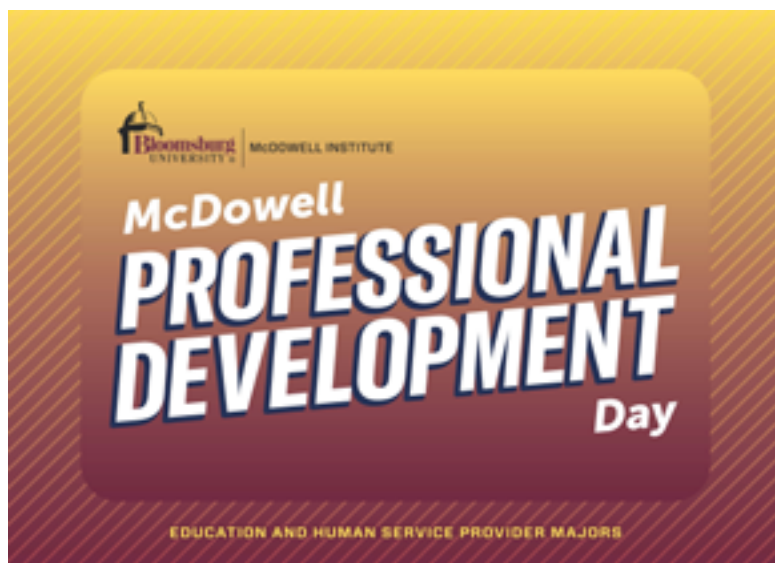
To learn more about equitable school practices in the commonwealth go to the **Equitable Practices Hub of PDE**.

MCDOWELL UPDATES

McDowell Institute Professional Development Day at BU on April 15th

Be sure not to miss this unique professional development opportunity being provided on April 15th in Kehr Union. This event will feature the following presentations:

- Youth Suicide Prevention (Gatekeeper) Training:
 - Youth Mental Health First Aid
 - Question – Persuade – Refer
- Adverse Childhood Experiences: Poverty Simulation
- Trauma 101
- Social-Emotional Learning and Alignment with Pennsylvania's Career Ready Skills
- Six Pillars of Equity: Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Building Individual Wellness of Educators through Development of Compassion Resilience



This opportunity is free and open to the BU community with emphasis on education majors as well as, majors in related human service fields (e.g., social work). Education majors, in particular, are highly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. Additional information is available at bloomu.edu/offices-directory/mcdowell-institute.

Personalized, Flexible, and Performance-Based Micro-Credentials Now Available!

Micro-credentials are available for pre- and in-service educators and individuals in related human services fields through the McDowell Institute. Act 48 credit through the Pennsylvania Department of Education for educators in the field is available upon successful completion of any given micro-credential. Each micro-credential is comprised of virtual, asynchronous learning experiences that reflect state-of-the-art practices designed to be:

PERSONALIZED |

You can create your learning journey based on your interests and career goals.

FLEXIBLE | You can study, learn and grow when it's convenient for you in an asynchronous manner.

PERFORMANCE-BASED |

You are awarded the relevant micro-credential based on demonstrated expertise.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS THAT ARE CURRENTLY OPEN TO ENROLLMENT INCLUDE:

Bullying Prevention (Five distinct credentials): Bullying Prevention in PK Programs, Bullying Prevention in K – 4 Programs, Bullying Prevention in Middle School, Bullying Prevention in High Schools, and Comprehensive Bullying Prevention PK-12. Each micro-credential highlights effective approaches to both prevent bullying in schools and methods to mitigate the adverse effects of bullying behavior.

Youth Suicide Prevention: Highlights the increasing rise of youth mental health challenges, the relationship between risk and protective factors associated with suicide risk, decoding signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, responding to youth in emotional distress, and applying multi-tiered logic to youth suicide prevention endeavors. This particular micro-credential provides the additional value of earning a certificate from Prevent Suicide PA as a result of the completion of the Suicide Prevention for Educators gatekeeper training.

To enroll in any of these micro-credentials that are of interest, visit: bloomu.edu/offices-directory/mcdowell-institute



Free Enrollment in the Kognito Module on Trauma-informed Practice in K-12 Schools

The McDowell Institute is providing free access to enrolled BU students in Kognito's Trauma-informed Practices for K-12 Schools. In this 45-minute module, you will learn how to recognize when a student's behavior might be the result of experiencing emotional distress or trauma, hold helpful conversations with them about

their feelings, problem-solve ways to make the classroom more comforting for students experiencing mental health challenges, assess the need for additional support along with skills to help students seek help when needed, and self-reflect on one's self-care needs as a teacher. Completion of this module awards a certificate to add to

your professional portfolio. Further, the content of this module explicitly aligns with that associated with the PDE Endorsement on Social Emotional behavioral Wellness of PK-12 Students at BU. Information on how to access the module can be found at bloomu.edu/offices-directory/mcdowell-institute.

Embedding Trauma-Informed Approaches in Educator Preparation Across the Commonwealth

The final report of this initiative is now available via the McDowell Institute's website. This report reflects sustainable capacity developed over the past four years across 27 institutions of higher education, including Bloomsburg University, that offer educator preparatory programs.

www.bloomu.edu/documents/mcdowell-trauma-informed-practices

Supports for Local Schools

The McDowell Institute continues to collaboratively support schools to foster the social-emotional wellness of their students across the immediate five-county region. One of these important initiatives provides professional development and technical assistance to educators in multi-tiered trauma-informed programs and practices. A second capacity-building initiative has been the Institute's ongoing support to a regionally established network of instructors in Youth Mental Health First Aid as well as Question-Persuade-Refer; both are evidence-based youth suicide prevention training programs. This network of trainers (comprised of 57 instructors) is providing youth suicide prevention training within and across local school systems in the region. The Institute guides planning and delivery of this training along with providing the network with information to enhance programs within their local school systems.

JED Campus Initiative Update

JED Campus endeavors to build mental health literacy and support for students on campus continue to evolve. These current efforts align with Act 110 entitled Suicide Prevention in Institutions of Higher Education which was enacted in the commonwealth in 2018. Efforts

are currently emphasizing an array of aligned programs and practices to support the social-emotional wellbeing of our campus community. Please contact either co-chair of BU's JED Campus Core Team (Drs. Mindy Andino and Tim Knoster) to gain

additional information as well as to become further involved with helping our campus build capacity along these same lines.

