



Simple Guidance on Acknowledging Student Effort and Performance

According to state-wide results from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (2019), nearly one in two 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade students (48.6%) in the commonwealth reported that their teachers praise them when they work hard in school. While it is encouraging that about half of our students feel that they are acknowledged when they work hard in school, it is concerning that

half do not share this same feeling. Acknowledgment for effort and performance are essential ingredients to the learning process at any age and this premise is one of the bedrocks of teacher preparation.

The old saying “you can attract more bees with honey than you can with vinegar,” aptly captures the rationale behind the importance of acknowledging desired student effort and performance. Whether the educational setting is traditional face-to-face, virtual or hybrid, acknowledgment of effort and performance is essential for each and every learner. It is particularly so for learners that have experienced or are experiencing trauma. A trauma-informed approach reflects six key principles that are generalizable across educational settings. Specifically, application of research validated practices that comprise the approach known as positive behavior support within which the delivery of positive reinforcement serves as a cornerstone and provides a firm foundation to create a trauma-informed learning environment. Providing explicit positive reinforcement (e.g., behavior-specific praise) for demonstration of pro-social behavior in concert

with acknowledgement of effort and performance in terms of academic work is essential. Further, this type of acknowledgment should occur on a frequent enough basis to achieve a 4 to 1 ratio of acknowledgment for desired behavior (pro-social skills, effort on tasks and assignments, and/or academic achievement) compared to redirection for undesired behavior. Provided here are a few ways to acknowledge student effort and performance across instructional settings.

Traditional Face-to-Face Classroom	Synchronous Virtual Instruction	Asynchronous Virtual Instruction
Behavior Specific Praise in tandem with gestures such as thumbs-up	Behavior Specific Praise in tandem with gestures such as thumbs-up	Behavior Specific Praise in tandem with gestures such as thumbs-up

No, your eyes are not deceiving you and no, the strategies shown in the chart are not typos. They are deliberately the same for one reason, acknowledgement is NOT unique to any one given instructional setting. Rather, the delivery of it may simply look different across instructional contexts. What this means is that good teaching is good teaching. Behavior specific praise can efficiently be delivered in the traditional face-to-face classroom through private statements such as “James, thanks for helping Sean think through that difficult problem. It was kind of you.” However, during synchronous virtual instruction, it may look different such as the teacher sending James a private chat in

tandem with posting a visual thumbs up on the heels of a supportive statement James directed towards Sean’s work. This simple illustration helps to clarify the age-old debate over what is often termed as “form vs. function.” Of course, the function in this case is the delivery of behavior-specific praise to further increase the likelihood of James continuing to display supportive pro-social skills with classmates. The form, on the other hand, looks different across instructional environments.

Beyond this simple discrete example, the operation of reinforcement systems that incorporate positive reinforcement such as a token economy at the classroom or school-wide level also generalizes across learning environments. To illustrate, in a traditional face-to-face classroom, the teacher may pair their delivery of behavior-specific praise with the award of a paper ticket (much like a movie ticket) that has been established to have a value (in a parallel sense to the way money has value to us as consumers). Students can later utilize their accumulated tokens, on a scheduled basis, to make purchases or enter random drawings. In a virtual environment the token (ticket in this case) cannot be physically delivered by the teacher to the student. However, a virtual ticket can be awarded as the form of currency employed to operate a virtual form of the token economy. Again, the issue of form versus function is relevant here in much the same way as the previous illustration.

Here is the take-away point to consider in light of the above illustrations. Acknowledging the well-documented power of positive reinforcement and its relevance to facilitating student effort and performance, the challenge becomes the translation process as to how it is delivered and what it looks like across instructional settings.



NAVIGATING STAFF NEEDS in Our Schools Throughout the Pandemic

The state of mental health across our nation appears to be at an all-time low. The undercurrent of increasing concerns about youth and adult social-emotional wellness has been present for some time and trending in an undesired direction. This undercurrent has been dramatically exacerbated by the current state of affairs associated with the pandemic in the United States, along with related stressors such as food insecurity, risk of homelessness, job loss, a contentious election, as well as social unrest that came to a head with the death of George Floyd. As stress-induced as these experiences have been, an additional layer of complexity has been added by the fact that both students and educational staff are concurrently navigating these challenges. The country has been going through a series of collective traumatic experiences, with varying impacts on individuals and groups. In short, everyone is trying to navigate the physical, psychological, and social-emotional impact of these traumatic experiences in their own way at the same time.

"We are not all in the same boat, but we are all in the same sea. Some on a yacht, some on a boat and some clinging to whatever floats our way and fighting with all of our might," -1st-grade teacher.

While it is unnecessary to share excessive amounts of data to substantiate the mental-health tsunami emerging across our nation, providing a few examples of the data for illustrative purposes is essential. To illustrate, according to Mental Health America, the number of people seeking help with anxiety and depression has skyrocketed from January through September of 2020:

- Mental Health America reported a 93% increase in adult anxiety screenings between Sept. 2019 and Sept. 2020.
- 8 of 10 people screened for depression reported moderate to severe depression symptoms during this same timeframe.

- Youth ages 11-17 in 2020 reflected similar higher screening levels for depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation.

Understandably, teachers to the best of their ability try to support their students and their families through all of these challenges. However, many teachers say they feel helpless in their efforts to help their students cope because they have been struggling with their own experiences.

Of course, there are no easy answers...and certainly no isolated, quick-fix solutions to our current state of affairs. Dr. Melissa Reeves (co-author of the PREPaRE curriculum, which trains school-employed mental health professionals and educators to best fill the roles and responsibilities generated by their membership on school crisis response teams), suggests that it may be helpful for us to re-frame our thinking throughout the pandemic. Dr. Reeves notes that we are used to solving problems, but the current pandemic is not a problem to be solved. Instead, viewing the pandemic as a dilemma may be more helpful, given that it has many changing variables that doesn't lend itself to being "solved". In other words, there is no one solution, and therefore unlikely that there will be a given point in time when the challenges associated with the pandemic and the angst associated with civil unrest will be completely gone, and life will simply return to as it was before March 2020.

For example, as positive as it is that we are on the brink of launching a vaccination program...a vaccination program alone will not solve the "problem" associated with the lasting effects of the pandemic on the economy as well as our emotional well-being. Our state of affairs with COVID 19 is more complex, meaning our approaches to such challenges will need to be dynamic and multi-faceted to adapt to changing variables over time. This may seem like a simple play on words at face value. However, re-framing our experiences and this pandemic as a dilemma may prove very useful to help both students and staff to move forward constructively.

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How to Support Staff Moving Forward

There are two essential leadership components necessary to create a trauma-informed school environment in light of our shared dilemma. The first is the Principal's own social and emotional competence (SEC), ability to handle stress, and consistent modeling of caring and culturally responsive behaviors with both staff and students. Principals who build healthy, trusting relationships with teachers in a manner that reflects sincere care and encouragement foster a positive school climate that supports social-emotional and academic outcomes. Effective leaders not only espouse acceptance, compassion, trust, and patience, but themselves are positive, caring, and empathic.

The second component is an enhanced leadership model to build capacity in students and adults through relationship-centered learning environments that cultivate social-emotional competencies. Taking a proactive approach to the evolving needs of students and staff can provide critical building blocks for the healing and well-being of the school community. Being a pro-social leader means ensuring that all staff, students, parents, and community members feel safe, cared for, respected, and valued. The following are a few ways to build and support relationship-centered learning environments:

1. Leverage existing systems and integrate social-emotional competencies into academic and behavioral structures (e.g., Emphasizing Pennsylvania's Career Ready Skills).
2. Provide ongoing professional development/coaching to address social-emotional competencies of staff and students, teaching personal growth strategies, and addressing bias among all adults working with children. Topics should include mindfulness-based interventions, emotional intelligence training, and systems thinking reflected with an MTSS framework.
3. Listen to the voices of staff to understand educators' perceptions with concerning the challenges associated with traditional/distant/hybrid learning environment, professional development needs, relationships, and school public health measures.

4. Understand the reality that staff, students, and families have experienced varying levels of trauma in the past year. Identify the current level of staff burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious trauma and provide supports.
5. Do what works and do it well. Intentionally facilitate enhanced relationships among educators, students, and families emphasizing successes.
6. Partner with families to foster consistent two-way communication that allows teachers to feel supported and safe in their role during these challenging times.
7. Provide opportunities for school staff to receive mental health screening and support through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other support structures. Confidentiality is critical, and there needs to be a culture of safety for staff to acknowledge they are struggling.

In alignment with these noted approaches, encourage and structure open and honest conversations among staff concerning our dilemma. Framing discussions in a manner that support staff to embrace the notion that the typical way in which we think about school has likely forever changed based on our recent necessity to embrace both virtual and hybrid learning experiences. As difficult as the past year has been, some invaluable lessons have been learned and instructional skills further advanced.

Administrators are essential to establishing a structure for constructive dialogue. However, teacher leaders and school counselors also play a significant role in facilitating these conversations. While it is both logical and understandable to talk about meeting the students' needs, be sure to have these conversations in a manner that equally emphasizes helping one and other as staff as we work our way through this dilemma with our eyes on the future.

In many ways, focusing on addressing staff needs will set the stage for the staff to more effectively and sustainably meet their students' needs. To this end, deliberative conversations can help staff articulate their own needs. While there may not be sufficient ways to fully address



all of the articulated needs in the immediate short-term, these conversations can serve to validate those challenges and set the stage to address them over the longer run. Some of the predictable needs that will likely surface through such conversations will include adjustments of expectations placed upon them as educators and strategies to provide some degree of re-occurring time to adjust to emerging demands associated with fluctuating between face-to-face, virtual and hybrid instruction. Relatedly, honesty and information are important to support staff, at a personal level, to facilitate processing of their own personal experiences. Kindness as well as patience are also necessary ingredients as we navigate our current challenges over time.

Related Strategies to Support Staff

STRATEGY	ILLUSTRATIONS
Build on existing strategies and infrastructure to build a sense of predictability	Use existing Multi-tier Systems of Support as the infrastructure to deliver social-emotional interventions. Establishing and maintaining routines that reflect clear expectations and, consistent behavior management provides a sense of safety and certainty.
Visibly message that a trauma-informed approach emphasizing equity is helpful for everyone...not just the kids	Structure and facilitate staff discussions that explicitly address trauma-informed approaches in a manner that validates the staff's feelings and concerns. Be sure to establish ground rules for respectful and constructive conversations for the common good. Have staff develop clear boundaries for safe participation.
Facilitate social connections and a "team" mentality	Provide physical and psychologically safe spaces (virtual and face-to-face when appropriate) for staff to convene and just freely talk/connect with one another. These spaces should be available on an on-going basis and can become focal communication portals concerning special events or at particular times throughout the year.
Consciously build in fun activities or events	Launch virtual, brief trivia games as well as related types of endeavors that staff can engage in voluntarily. Perhaps build in periodic random drawings or raffles for low-cost ticket items to jump-start staff engagement as relevant (e.g. "Shout Out Fridays," "virtual positive postcards").
Increase positive messaging that promotes random as well as structured acts of kindness	Establish or enhance existent kindness campaigns among BOTH staff and students. One simple place to start is posting random positive notes of encouragement on staff desks and workspaces as well on student lockers and other high traffic areas. Publicize examples of acts of kindness at school and in the local community.
Talk openly about social, emotional, wellness, and mental health issues in a culturally responsive way	Deliberately build into professional development explicit addressment of social emotional wellness, emphasizing self-care strategies. Provide self-care tips for the week along with posting short positive mental health message in highly visible areas (e.g., in bathrooms and convening spaces where a staff member (or student) might be for a short time). Provide staff with links to brief videos on self-care, typically running no longer than 2-5 minutes in length.
Increase awareness of warning signs associated with compassion fatigue as well as anxiety and depression	Engage community partners, including members of the local mental health community, to provide informational materials about compassion fatigue, relevant warning signs of anxiety and depression coupled with clear directions on where and how to reach out for help if you or a colleague or friend needs help.

Another point of emphasis in these conversations should be on increasing self-awareness, of being in touch with one's own sense of well-being, self-regulation and our ability to cope with stressors in our lives, and self-care strategies through exercise, meditation and mindfulness, and maintaining eating and sleeping rituals. Self-care strategies can also be aligned with establishing a healthy emotional balance between school-home-community life.

As important as the approaches mentioned above are, the primary key and underlying foundation to navigating this dilemma comes down to the breadth and depth of our relationships with others and how we communicate with one another throughout this difficult time frame. In many ways, staying connected, or becoming further connected, is essential so as to not succumb to the challenges associated with our current dilemma.

Likely, one of the most important things to do to support our students throughout this dilemma is to increase our efforts to ensure that our educational staff's needs are being addressed. This is not to suggest that we need to make schools ALL about the adult staff. However, what is suggested is that there needs to be increasing degrees of actions that are visibly present on a regular basis in schools that demonstrates an understanding that it is unlikely our students will flourish if our staff are struggling.

Supporting Reflection and Conversation about Equity in Education

Broad societal issues that affect daily life across communities equally impact the tone and tenor of conversations and activities throughout the ebb and flow of schools. The issue of equity, along with related topics of implicit bias and cultural proficiency, are increasingly becoming a focal point of conversations in our schools. This conversation is both necessary and healthy in order to ensure equitable outcomes for students with an emphasis on demographic groups of students that have been historically marginalized in society and relatedly have disproportionately experienced less than desired outcomes. One factor that can inhibit meaningful reflection and constructive conversations concerning these inter-related topics is not having a common language. Provided here is a brief glossary of some of the more common terms essential to facilitate constructive reflection, conversations, and action towards equity in schools as highlighted in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's publication entitled Pennsylvania Equity and Inclusion Toolkit. Additional information on equity in schools beyond these

excerpted terms can be gleaned by accessing this publication via the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network's website (www.pattan.net).

Cultural Proficiency: Cultural proficiency in education is the level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that are required to teach and interact with students successfully and to work effectively with colleagues from a variety of cultures by holding all forms of cultural difference in high esteem. Cultural proficiency requires continuing self-assessment of one's values, beliefs, and biases grounded in cultural humility; an ongoing vigilance toward the dynamics of diversity, difference and power, and the expansion of knowledge of cultural practices that recognize cultural bridges as going both ways. Culturally proficient services require that both the individual and the institution be culturally proficient. These five essential elements contribute to an institution's ability to become more culturally proficient:

1. **Value Diversity:** Claim your differences; incorporate

differences into the curriculum; and acknowledge the contribution of various cultural and ethnic groups through teaching and lessons.

2. **Assess Culture:** Name the differences; recognize how your culture affects the culture of others; describe your own culture and the cultural norms of your organization; and understand how the culture of your organization affects those with different cultures.
3. **Manage the Dynamics of Difference:** Develop a process for cross-cultural communication and create a cross-cultural conflict mediation plan.
4. **Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge:** Incorporate cultural knowledge into teacher induction plans; weave into professional development plans; and structure opportunities to engage parents and communities.
5. **Adapt to Diversity:** Realize that change is challenging and healthy; and revisit community needs and values to align school policies and resources.

Equity: Equity is best defined to mean "more for those who need it." There is a common misunderstanding that the terms equity and equality can be used interchangeably to describe a scenario that "levels the playing field" to provide opportunity and resources for all. Where equality allows equal access to resources and opportunities and is essential for educational success, equity



Equity in Education

accounts for the fact that some need more resources to succeed on that same playing field.

Implicit Bias: Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for social and/or political correctness. Instead, implicit biases are not readily or easily accessible through personal introspection.

The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at an early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media, and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations.

- Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality, such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce one another.
- The implicit associations we hold do not always align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own "group", though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our own "group".
- Implicit biases are malleable. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned.

MCDOWELL UPDATES

Support for BU Student Teachers Spring 2021

The McDowell Institute will be operating virtual office hours throughout the spring 2021 semester to support student teachers. Student teachers will have access to 1-1 virtual guidance and technical assistance associated with addressing the social-emotional-behavioral support needs of their students in their respective PK-12 student teaching placements. Any student teacher with concerns about a particular student's emotional well-being, trauma-informed preventive classroom management in general, or perhaps their own particular needs as they navigate the stress associated with their student teaching experience during these trying times, is encouraged to contact Dr. Knoster (tknoster@bloomu.edu) to schedule a time to meet virtually.



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PDE Endorsement in Social-Emotional-Behavioral Wellness PK-12 Students

The College of Education formally launched the approved Pennsylvania Department of Education's Endorsement in Social Emotional Behavioral Wellness with PK-12 Students in 2020. Currently, there are 30 undergraduate students enrolled in educator preparatory programs at BU officially pursuing this endorsement. Additionally, there are eight graduate students that are concurrently completing this endorsement in context of their respective graduate programs within the College of Education. Bloomsburg University was one of the initial higher education institutions to receive approval from PDE to offer this unique endorsement. Completion of this endorsement prepares educators to implement trauma-informed practices in school and community-based settings. Undergraduate students enrolled in an educator preparatory program and interested in exploring this endorsement should contact Dr. Stephanie Gardner (sgardner@bloomu.edu) and graduate students with similar interest are encouraged to contact Dr. Robin Drogan (rdrogan@bloomu.edu).

Trauma-informed Virtual Modules within Core College of Education Coursework

As of Spring 2021 there are seven virtual trauma-informed modules that are strategically embedded across core coursework within BU's College of Education. In most instances this course work is required regardless of professional discipline by all undergraduate education majors as depicted below. Concurrently, these modules are increasingly being embedded within graduate level course work.

Module	Course
Introduction to Trauma & Adverse Childhood Experiences	SPECED 101
Rapport as a Protective Factor in Building Student Resiliency	SPECED 275
Kognito: At-risk Middle School Suicide Prevention	EDFOUND 291
ACEs: Consideration about Trauma for Classroom Teachers	SPECED 358
Building Student resiliency through Social & Emotional Behavior Expectations	SPECED 358
Positive Reinforcement as a Protective Factors in Building Student resiliency	EDFOUND 406
What is Social Emotional Learning	ELEMED 410

Each of these modules, with the exception of Kognito: At-Risk Middle School Suicide Prevention, are asynchronous virtual modules developed through the McDowell Institute. Based on the most recent data-run from the 2020 spring and fall semesters, there have been over 1,000 module completions across students enrolled in the above referenced coursework. In addition to these modules, the McDowell Institute also provides access for all aspiring educators to Youth Mental Health First Aid training. To learn more about these modules or YMHA training contact Danielle Empson (dempson@bloomu.edu).

BU Faculty Fellowships Awarded 2021



Dr. Stephanie Gardner



Dr. Robin Drogan



Dr. David Fazzino



Dr. Margaret O'Connor



Dr. Skye Chernichky-Karcher

The McDowell Institute is pleased to announce five Faculty Fellowships awards in 2021. Recipients in 2021 include Dr. Stephanie Gardner and Dr. Robin Drogan (Co-recipients from Department of Exceptionality Programs), Dr. David Fazzino (Department of Anthropology), Dr. Skye Chernichky-Karcher (Department of Communication Studies), along with Dr. Margaret O'Connor (Department of Information Technology, Analytics, and Business Education).

Drs. Gardner and Drogan are returning McDowell Fellows and will continue their collaborative research on the implementation of universal preventative behavior management techniques utilizing video analysis of pre-correction and behavior-specific praise by BU education majors in practicum and student teaching placements across local schools. The focus of Dr. Fazzino's fellowship will be in the arena of trauma-informed yoga to help mitigate the stressors associated with the current pandemic and beyond. Dr. O'Connor's fellowship endeavors will highlight how mindfulness techniques can support students to navigate associated trauma, anxiety and stress during these unprecedented times. The emphasis of Dr. Chernichky-Karcher's fellowship will be on emerging adult-parent conversations about mental health to further explore the role of family communication in how college students navigate their mental health.



The Jed Foundation

JED Campus Initiative Update

Bloomsburg University continues to make progress in its efforts associated with becoming a JED Campus. BU is in the second of a four-year data-informed strategic planning and implementation process to further build capacity related to student mental health, to ward-off substance abuse and to reduce risk factors associated with suicide. These efforts also align with Pennsylvania's Act 110 entitled Suicide Prevention in Institutions of Higher Education enacted in the commonwealth in 2018 which in many ways' parallels ACT 71 legislation relevant to PK-

12 education. Areas of emphasis in the JED process include review of policy and procedures in place to support the social emotional well-being of students across an array of inter-related areas (e.g., Promoting Social Connectedness, Access to Care, Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training with Students-Faculty-Staff). A core team of faculty, staff, and students help guide the process with external technical assistance from JED Campus consultants and subject matter experts. To learn more about the JED process here at BU contact Dr. Tim Knoster (tknoster@bloomu.edu) or Dr. Janet Rarig (jrarig@bloomu.edu).