

Relationships and Mental Health: Examples from Across Oregon

Bethel School District: *Being Intentional About Centering Students' Funds of Knowledge*

Bethel School District is located in Eugene, OR, and is affiliated with Lane Education Service District. Within Bethel School District, a central focus of this school year is building relationships and creating intentionality around understanding the funds of knowledge of students and staff. In preparing for the 2021-2022 school year, there was agreement district-wide that student voice and culturally responsive teaching are centered around deeply knowing students. Foundational to this assertion were discussions around the ways teachers had the opportunity to get to know their students in more holistic ways during distance learning as students were learning in their homes and there was more ready access to families. While the learning environment has changed for students and teachers

this year, the desire to continue building deep relationships with students and families whether in person or in the digital environment has remained.



Wanting to deepen relationships within both in-person learning as well as within the digital learning environment through the Bethel Online Academy, the focus has been on creating a system for understanding students' funds of knowledge to think about relationship building as an intentional practice asking the question: *how do you put data about students' funds of knowledge side by side with attendance data, behavior data, etc.?*

This work began first with administrators thinking intentionally about one another's funds of knowledge and has since been rolled out at schools across the district with the goal of shifting understandings of data and relationship building toward one of intentionality. Tina Gutierrez-Schmich, Bethel School District's Director of Teaching and Learning-Equity and Inclusion said that the most important part of this work is to ensure that centering students' funds of knowledge is a common practice in building strong relationships and humanizing understandings of data.

The practice of seeing relationships as data and being intentional about understanding students' funds of knowledge has expanded across the district in both brick and mortar schools as well as the Bethel Online Academy. The timing of this work has been integral to shifting the understanding of relationship building as an idea to relationship building as an intentional and data-driven practice to take what students know, understand their funds of knowledge, and build these funds of knowledge into the system just as we would other data such as test scores, grades, attendance, etc.

[Click here to learn more about the work that is happening within Bethel School District.](#)

Intermountain ESD Virtual Learning Academy: *Building Strong Relationships with Students and Families*

Intermountain ESD Virtual Academy is part of a consortium model developed to support local school districts affiliated with Intermountain Education Service District. As part of the consortium, Intermountain ESD Virtual Academy supports local districts in providing virtual learning opportunities designed to support students and families needing flexibility in learning while still retaining attendance in their local school district.



During the 2020-2021 school year, there was a large focus on relationship building with students and families. This involved program-wide initiatives including building SEL (social-emotional learning) into lessons with synchronous learning opportunities focusing on self-regulation skills and coping skills. Further, as students are still connected to their local zoned district, teachers were able to work with local districts to create a bridge with their program and home district liaison to provide counseling support and resources for students and families.

At the elementary level, in particular, building relationships with students and families became a central focus of the day, which has continued into this year. Kristen Simpson, who teaches primary grades, has initiated several programs, routines, and activities to deepen relationships with her students and their families. Kristen explained that one of the aspects of teaching in a virtual setting that she loves is getting to see families more often and getting to know students and their families at a deeper level because she is "in their home." Describing her classroom as an intimate learning experience, Kristen works with both students and their learning coaches (which are typically family members) in a variety of ways to support the learning process for students and their learning coaches. During the 2020-2021 school year, Kristen started holding Learning Mentor Nights, which were virtual opportunities for families to connect while at the same time learning new content and strategies to support their students. Some Learning Mentor Nights have focused on content e.g. math skills, the writing workshop process, etc. while others are focused on deepening understandings of the virtual academy. By recording these community meetings and holding virtual office hours, Kristen is able to connect with families consistently and in meaningful ways.

Although Kristen has spent the majority of her teaching career teaching in an in-person setting, she has found that teaching virtually has offered her new ways to build relationships with her students and their families while also introducing them to expanded learning opportunities. One way that she has done this is through holding monthly field trips wherein the entire family is invited to attend. These field trips which range from taking a [tour of a reindeer farm in Alaska](#), to thematic field trips, like taking a tour of a bakery, the library, and the local fire station during their unit on community, has enabled her to deeply engage with her students' entire family in ways that would not be possible without technology.

[Click here to learn more about the work that is happening at Intermountain ESD Virtual Learning Academy.](#)

Clackamas Web Academy: Supporting Students' Emotional, Social, and Psychological Needs



Clackamas Web Academy (CWA) is a free public charter school sponsored by the North Clackamas School District and accredited by Cognia. CWA provides instruction to students in Oregon through an innovative combination of online curricula, onsite classes, labs, academic tutoring, and access to college classes. This model was designed to ensure that each student feels academically challenged and supported. To achieve this foundational goal, CWA recognizes the importance of supporting each student's social and emotional well-being as well, which has made CWA a place where students want to learn and teachers want to work. Brad Linn, CWA's principal noted that *"Clackamas Web Academy is really committed to supporting the whole child. In doing that*

we recognize that it is important to support the family as well. So, we have created a school that supports not only students' academic needs but we have systems in place to ensure that we are concurrently supporting students' emotional, social, and psychological needs." At CWA, this happens in a variety of ways including:

- **Advisory Program:** Each certified teacher and educational assistant at CWA serves as an advisor to a group of students. Advisors meet once every other week with each of their individual students and their family. Conversations around students' social and emotional well-being are at the core of these meetings with opportunities to strengthen levels of support as needed.
- **House Meetings:** In the last three years, as requested by staff and students, CWA has begun holding house meetings where students are grouped based on cohort (e.g. grade level). During house meetings, students have the opportunity to come onsite or attend virtually to meet with their advisor, connect with other teachers, and deepen their relationships with their peers. House meetings include opportunities for team-building activities and provide students with stronger connections to their school community.
- **Counseling Program:** When students are enrolled, they are assigned a certified counselor and an advisor. The counselor and advisor use their complementary skills and experiences to provide our students and families with extensive academic, social, and emotional support. This partnership gives each student two CWA adult advocates that are knowledgeable of their academic needs and goals.
- **LifeStance Health:** CWA partners with LifeStance Health, which allows them to support students who need additional mental health support. CWA's LifeStance coach, Marisa Martin, is a licensed clinician who works onsite to support students one on one, teach grade-specific social-emotional lessons, and participate in house meetings.

[Click here to learn more about the work that is happening at Clackamas Web Academy.](#)