

SPOTLIGHT ON

Danbury Local Schools



In this interview, **Superintendent Cari Buehler** of Danbury Local Schools, discusses how she and her district used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to help both teachers and students address mental health and wellness needs using new methods as the district transitioned back to in-person learning.

Q: What impact did COVID have on the students?

As with so many districts, we noticed some students struggle with the transition back to in-person learning. COVID was really hard on them; not just academically but also emotionally. **We decided we needed to find a way to break down the walls many students put up.**

Q: What was your solution?

We adopted a method known as Restorative Practice Circles. Students physically circle up, there are no barriers. Then they build relationships with each other. They talk—sometimes casually, sometimes more in depth. If harm has been done within that circle, we address that harm. It's not just the students, we're teaching this to the staff too.

Q: What's the benefit?

We teach children how to build relationships. The circle helps them foster empathy and learn conflict resolution and makes them more aware of their own mental health. **We wanted to get students away from their phones and connecting to the people right in front of them.**

Q: Are you happy with the results?

Absolutely. We teach around 600 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. We sometimes have to administer disciplinary actions throughout the year. **There might be a few suspensions a year, but so far this year we haven't had a single suspension or expulsion.** We're not just doling out the consequence for the action—we're looking at the root cause and repairing the harm.

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