

Collaborative Problem Solving in Marshalltown, IA Schools

20 MIN · YOUTUBE · [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=KEVVWELJLk4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEVVWELJLk4)

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SUMMARY

The discussion centers on the implementation of Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) in a school district to address behavioral challenges and improve student outcomes. The approach has fostered a shift in mindset among educators, leading to better relationships with students and a focus on understanding the underlying issues affecting their behavior.

- Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) has been integrated into the school district's approach to support students, particularly those facing behavioral challenges.*
- The district has seen significant reductions in office referrals, restraints, and improvements in emotional safety among students.*
- CPS emphasizes understanding the root causes of student behavior rather than attributing issues to laziness or lack of motivation.*
- Training sessions for staff and parents have led to increased engagement and positive feedback from families about their children's progress.*
- The approach has been particularly effective in a dual-language school, enhancing the learning environment for diverse populations.*
- Therapeutic classrooms have been established for students with severe behavioral issues, resulting in improved engagement and academic performance.*
- The success of CPS is attributed to its relational focus, moving away from traditional reward systems to fostering meaningful connections with students.*
- The implementation of CPS has highlighted the need for adult educators to adapt their beliefs and practices to align with this new approach.*

and I was reading some of the works by Bruce

Perry and at the end of um the most recent edition of his book the boy who was raised as a dog and actually speaks a little bit to the collaborative problem-solving process so when I I love the book you know it made a lot of sense to me it was highly engaging and so when I hear this I'm like well I need to learn more I found some materials online and did just some general reading about it and then I found some of

the YouTube videos that were published um you know

one in particular it's a little more than an hour long and it's Dr abalon just doing a general overview about collaborative problem solving well I wanted to learn even more so at the time there was an online opportunity to take essentially an online course and

I brought myself in a group of principals some of my school counselors we have these kind of Social Work type positions and we all enrolled and we took these classes and we got done and I sat around the table and

said what do you guys think and they absolutely said we love it you know that's exactly what we were talking about we need to learn more so then I decided I need to get a group of people who are actually through the training you know I've been reading the literature online um let's see where we have a tier one training and how many people I can send and after that completed they came back and I said what to do here what did you learn

what are the things you're excited about and they continue to promote of yes the more we hear about this the further we get into it the more we agree it's it's a necessary fit for us you know we're about 5 300 kids we have 11 attendance centers 71 percent of our kids this year are eligible for free or reduced lunch which is the ninth highest in our state 31 of our kids are within the Continuum of the English language proficiency

scale which is the third highest in Iowa and third most saturated in the state culturally about 54 of our kids identify with Hispanic Latino 30 of our kids identify as white or Caucasian 7.5 of our kids identify as Asian about three and a half percent of our kids identify as black or African-American and then everyone else will identify an automatic a multi-categorical way

so we were trying to figure out like how do we work with this unique population Iowa and I went with the principles I went with our intermediate agency they're called aeas or area education agencies in a group of like 20 I guess went down to a summer tier one and we all came back with just our mind spinning of this is our missing piece what do we need to do and then fate happened about two weeks later uh ef3 tornado came through our community

and in a community like ours that is really a very blue-collar Community it it devastated things you know it it hit through some of our major businesses residential area and so so many of our families were displaced and they were dealing with trauma so we decided to bring Dr Avalon in and address all of our staff for the first day of school as well as then ask him to do some parent groups um in the evenings we had such tremendous feedback off of

it that we thought this is something that makes sense here in Marshalltown this is something we need to develop and grow and since 2017-18 we've been working to do that as systematic as we can you know I I would say we're still early in

and we definitely have people who have bought into it and understand it and see the result but we still have people that were trying to onboard because it's just such a different way of thinking about supporting kids and Families

those who have really bought into it it has changed the focus of the discussion it's it's moved from things like well they would if they you know wanted to or kind of those dead-end ideas of this family's always been this way I've worked with other kids right you know I was a teacher for the parents and they were this way when they were that age to a reframing of what's happened to this kiddo what about this situation is so difficult for

them that I've seen them do this before but today they can't um and it's really made our conversations and those situations more solution focused and it also improves the relationship you know checking in with kids and letting them feel like they have a voice and they have a choice you just can't put money in the bank quick enough that way so that when you have those days where you have to really hold to your own expectations that relationship's in a place where you can get

some buy-in from the kids as well and they don't always feel like you're imposing your will on them so we're seeing in settings where people are really invested in it good relationships ability to have difficult conversations and really a problem solving philosophy so the first I'll talk about is one of our elementary schools same as Woodbury Elementary and it's a preschool through fourth grade school before we began our work in collaborative problem

solving we you know we track many of the things most schools do how many kids go to the office how many kids are so aggressive that they require physical restraints how many kids are in a situation where safety is such a big issue that we have to use the clue hearing time out what are the factors that make the learning environment safe which our state of Iowa has a Universal Survey they do at Woodbury which has really internalized this work

we've seen a decrease since 2018-19 to last year office referrals are down over 36 percent the number of students who have two or more office referrals are down 49 percent the need to use seclusion and or restraint is down by 28 and most importantly so our state of Iowa has what they call the conditions for learning survey it's a survey that goes out to our

staff members our kids and our families that asks about the well-being and the learning environments really around SEL before this that survey showed that Woodbury Elementary was seven percent below the state average on emotional safety you

know how safe did kids feel in that school last year they were seven percent above the state average so we've seen the significant swing in

kids are feeling connected regulated and that it's a safe learning environment so I guess the other unique thing about Woodbury Elementary is that it is a dual Language School so our families who go there they learn in Spanish for half a day and then they learn in English for half a day and the general population of that school is really those families who are moving into Iowa that are completely Spanish-speaking coming from Mexico and other countries the last

and probably my favorite story um a few years ago we identified that there are there are kids in schools that have serious underlying mental health conditions and and those create the behaviors that we see that are unsafe and that we really worry about in Iowa there's not a lot of facilities to work with kids who are beyond what most schools can work with so we tried to create our own and we call it the therapeutic classrooms

and in there we have integrated CPS as our primary model into a trauma-informed approach and we work with kids that usually would you know be placed in residential treatment or day school programs or you know out-of-state kind of psychiatric facilities and we are seeing success when 96 of the kids in there and they range from kindergarten through ninth grade and I mean by success is you know if they were in their comprehensive schools on average they may

have four or five six behavioral incidents a day they may have two to three behavioral incidents a month now um they're not running out of school they're not destroying property they're engaged in their learning in fact on our most recent state required literacy academic assessment every one of our 18 students made growth in literacy and they're excited to come to

school their attendance is way up their families who we had a really difficult relationship with you know for a variety of reasons there we don't have that kind of out of you know that difficult situation anymore they love our teachers they love our little program they love that there's a place that their kids can grow and learn and get their needs met so those are the places I would talk about as a system we're doing it and doing it well and seeing those great outcomes

I want to share a couple things thinking through kind of the special education lens so federal law around special education really does dictate a variety of things that seem very prescriptive on how you have to think and approach supporting kids who may have behavioral challenges platter problem solving has been a game changer

in a lot of our situations with kids with disabilities who have those behavioral struggles because not only does it address some of those

underlying conditions that we never thought about but it helps us then create a pretty clear way to do checks and balances along the way on a plan B conversation is a great way to see how are things going in this element of the instructional skill building that you're trying to do so our district has really committed to providing a full Continuum of services to our families on social emotional learning and as part of that then my job as the

Director who oversees it was to gain as much knowledge and skills as possible so first I've been through the inaugural cohort of Castle the collaborative for academic social emotional learning and have completed their fellows program I've also completed two cohorts with the national superintendents associations both mental health work as well as our SEL cohort so working with these folks has provided me with a really strong Foundation about what is

evidence-based research-based social emotional learning across a continuum what happens at school-wide what happens within the classrooms what happens within the teachers mindsets and having that together we have created an infrastructure to support our needs of our kids foundationally we had to get on the same page about what are our common beliefs about kids many school districts will talk about positive behavioral interventions and support to PBIS and

what we've learned about PBIS is that first it's very regulating the kids to know what's expected of them across settings you know many times their life is a little bit out of control at home and there's a lot of chaos but knowing that when I walked into the school if I'm in the cafeteria here's what's expected of me if I'm in the classroom here's what I'm expected like that brings down some of the anxiety you can get away with

our next piece though is ensuring that everything we do based on our thinking with cloud or problem solving is relational so we've moved away in many of our locations from that that token economy system that reward system when kids are meeting expectations to those relational interactions I would also ask people to look carefully at the components of the other approaches that they're using you know within our district we we think about a multi-step process and so I talked

a little bit about PBIS as a regulating system for all kids across all settings we also use classroom approaches responsive classroom is something we use at the elementary and we have found that CPS has such a great companion component to that

responsive classroom model that they go hand in hand it's not are we doing this are we doing that we are we're supporting all kids under a

common framework and the language complements each other with our older kids um capturing kids Hearts has been an approach that we found really beneficial and again as the language of ckh and language of cliver problems they support each other and the framework and the thinking behind it so I would say I don't want people to think about you know within an integrated system there are going to be a number of components you know you're making a stew here and you

got a bunch of ingredients in this stew and I've found that CPS has integrated very well into our stew that also has evidence-based and research based behind every piece of it when I went to high school and I'm not going to say how old I am but when I went to high school the idea was Matt if you go to high school you need to go to college and if you can complete College you will get a good job and your job skills will be taught to you on site

many of the things that I thought were skills back then now I can learn from YouTube or there's a video somewhere to teach this the things that weren't taught to me that now we're hearing kids need to have are conflict resolution skills problem solving skills critical thinking skills an internal drive to be successful in something with a level of Independence and so as we think about now those are our umbrellas or goals for you know those soft

skills kind of problem solving lends itself perfectly to it you know it's teaching kids how to deal with difficult situations in not getting upset essentially you know staying regulated so something has happened that I wasn't predicting and so I'm going to get upset about it let's pause let's keep ourselves regulated and start problem solving how do we address this issue whether it's with a task a situation another person um you know it's a very generalizable

set of skills I would say across all those soft skills for employability so we have been working on engaging parents in learning about collaborative problem solving through we call either watch parties or Community Wellness nights that we're doing once a quarter and families can come into our schools and and see and learn more about it I think the most engaging part about all of this is not only are we continuing to try to teach

them about it but now when we have school board meetings we have families showing up saying I absolutely love that you know my child that I was getting phone calls on all the time for whatever reason the phone calls I get now are positive

phone calls and that I'm seeing that my child when I'm having difficulty with him or her at home I can kind of engage in that process and generally work through it and even sometimes my kids are coaching me even elementary kids um so that we

can try to work through this conversation in a regulated way for our mutually agree upon solution the other thing and I'm excited and also a little bit embarrassed to say this the kids take to it well and quickly the implementation delays are really about the adults and dealing with our own internal conflicts of how we were raised what we believe shouldn't shouldn't be kind of Behavioral strategies classroom management or just innate skills you know that

any adult or child should have at some age but for the kids when we do this and do this well as an approach they pick it up like that you know as I work with kids or talk with some of the buildings that work with kids regularly in this approach three four conversations in the kids can start to tell you what that next component is what's that next step that you're going to talk to them about

um and they actually engage in it as long as they see it's successful for them being heard and feeling like they have some choice they will take you there if you let them so that was another real surprise of it's the kids that this is you know going super easy with it's the adults that we're going to have to work through a variety of different things to try to get you know their neural cognitive skills aligned with what we're doing here

I'd begin with just a philosophy um not only do I love that they have a philosophy but when you hear you know kids do well if they can if kids could do well they would do well and so our job you know is to figure out what are the things getting in the way of them doing well like just that General umbrella of thinking to every situation it was an aha moment for so many of us who went through

either the online training or went in person to take care one because like so many it wasn't our thinking was what happened to this child or what is getting in the way for this child it was oh they're just being lazy or you know what is the bigger carrot or stick I can wave at them to get them motivated to do this you know what do I need to do to compel them to move forward instead of what do I need to do to lift them up and support them so they can move forward

so that first part was just amazing aha for so many of us and it's so simple yes it is skill problems you're right if I look at them they are trying harder than most other kids that you know these skills are already there and it happens easy [Music]