

## Have You Heard?

To better understand the life of a child living in poverty, a group of Red Clay teachers put themselves in their shoes earlier this month.

## Read More

On a Sunday night, a family plans their finances for the upcoming week. Utilities are due, but there is no food for dinner. The family faces tough decisions, as they do not have enough money for both. This was just one of the situations presented to an assembly of Wilmington educators at the Community Action Poverty Simulation on June 12, 2018, simulating life for the more than 40 million Americans living in poverty, 37 percent under the age of 18. The training was presented by the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) with the help of a grant from the National Education Association.

The training assists educators gain a better understanding of the tough decisions that families living in poverty are forced to make on a daily basis. "The goal is to make the classroom a safe space," stated DSEA Director of Public Relations Shelley Meadowcroft. "Early intervention services include understanding trauma and how it adversely effects the classroom behavior of a student."

Participants were paired into groups as a family. The family model varied economically, in regards to parent(s) or guardian(s), living arrangements and means of transportation. The "family" would need to complete a series of life events each week using only the resources given.

Members from various state departments volunteered to role-play employees of various state agencies. Delaware First Lady Tracey Carney was a utility worker, DSEA President Mike Matthews portrayed a thief and Red Clay Administrator Harold Shaw worked at a local food market. Additional volunteers portrayed the roles of various resources including pay day loans, pawn shops, quick cash stores and government agencies and departments.

During the debriefing session, "families" explained how frustrated they were with inability to pay bills and provide food, often feeling trapped. "As a child, I felt that I was more of a burden to my parents than anything else," stated Warner elementary teacher Melissa Morris.

The training session was paid for by the Compassionate Connections Partnership Grant, \$253,000 awarded by the NEA to work on the issue of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) [experienced by students](#). The partnership also includes the Delaware Department of Education, First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, the Delaware Office of Child Advocate, Children and Families First, the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies, and ACLU Delaware. The grant award supports programming focused on developing and implementing trauma-sensitive strategies to improve student achievement and resilience in five of the "priority" schools in Delaware.

DSEA was joined in implementing the Compassionate Connections Partnership grant program by the Christina and Red Clay Education Associations and their respective school district leadership.

The *Compassionate Connections Partnership* believes that the identified schools can meet the physical and emotional needs of their students, enhance student resilience, and improve student achievement by:

- Providing staff at each school with professional development on childhood trauma and the strategies necessary to change the culture of the school;
- Managing and improving the emotional health and wellness of the school's staff;
- Providing each school with a system of Individual Student Supports, which will help increase student and family access to a comprehensive set of health services and community supports;
- Capturing data and assessing the impact of interventions on the students.

Each of the project schools has a steering committee made up of educators and administrators. These committees are tasked with creating the path forward for each school year of the project. Their plans

focus on development of goals and the implementation of strategies to help their respective schools become more trauma-sensitive and trauma informed.

In particular, the steering committees for Red Clay Consolidated School District's Shortlidge Academy and Warner Elementary have made major strides during the first year of this grant. They have even gone a step further and joined together for meetings to share the work and progress their schools have made. These committees believe that since Shortlidge's feeder pattern leads into Warner, it will best serve their students to make sure that both staffs are working together to seamlessly continue the trauma-sensitive practices they are rolling out in their schools.

The two committees are made up of the following educators: LaShanda Wooten, Denise Lenz, Toni Bostick, Deborah Ashton, Javana Rhodes, Lia Zucchini, Donna O'Connor, Eunique Lawrence, Frances Russo-Avena, Kelley Lumpkin, Desiree Faison, Chrishaun Fitzgerald, Shanae Moore, Jaela Hall, Shauna Hooper, Eboni Myatt, Rosalind Jackson, Taurean Taylor, Jessica Mahoney, Teren Stokes, Emma Cooper, and Harold Shaw from RCSD District Office.

At the beginning of the year, when the committees were first formed, each school set their own goals. Shortlidge goals focused on developing a school-wide Compassionate Care team, developing an educational PD opportunity for trauma awareness and toxic stress and its effect on students and families, administering the ACEs survey to the staff and reviewing the results, providing an introduction to trauma awareness through a PowerPoint slide show and providing the staff with a team journal poster.

Warner's committee also set goals focused on building awareness by sharing the scientific facts from the CDC ACE's study, having their staff complete the ACE survey and share results, showing the documentaries *Paper Tigers* and *Resilience* to staff, and sharing posters created at trainings on where they want to be in a year and how they plan to get there. Both schools have met and exceeded these goals. Steering Committee members are looking forward to the next school year and continuing this much-needed work.

The steering committees have participated in several professional development trainings throughout the year, including an all-day event in December that focused on creating a Trauma Sensitive Learning Environment. The committees have also worked to support their fellow staff members year-round, but especially during more stressful times of the year, like testing. They regularly promote self-care practices and are looking to offer "Mindfulness" training for their staff members.