

# Creating a Caring School Community at Belmont-Cragin Elementary in Chicago

Categories: Professional Learning

At the Center for the Collaborative Classroom (CCC), one way we strengthen and fulfill our mission-to help students grow as critical thinkers who learn from, care for, and respect one another-is to partner with schools and organizations that have similar goals and aspirations for their kids. In the 2012-2013 school year, we were fortunate to find like-minded partners at Belmont-Cragin Elementary in the Chicago Public Schools, and at the Safe Schools Pilot Project. This project, supported by Mental Health America of Illinois, the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, involved Belmont-Cragin embarking on a commitment to learn about and practice social and emotional learning (SEL). During that first year, CCC and the team from the Safe Schools Pilot Project began by supporting the adults at Belmont-Cragin, helping them foster a learning community to explore social and emotional learning and how it impacted their roles as teachers, administrators, educational support staff, and parents.

During the 2013-2014 school year, after a careful review of evidence-based curricula, the school selected Caring School Community to support implementation of SEL schoolwide. CCC facilitated professional learning for Belmont-Cragin's staff as they began to implement Class Meetings, Check-ins, Cross-age Buddies, and Schoolwide Community Building Activities. Simultaneously, the Safe Schools Pilot Project helped integrate a focus on bullying prevention with Caring School Community, providing support for administering school culture surveys, analyzing resulting data, and helping Belmont-Cragin staff use the data to fine-tune their SEL policies and practices.

The 2014-2015 school year launched with a renewed focus on professional learning, including in-class support for teachers, as well as a commitment to more fully implement Cross-age Buddies and Homeside Activities. Peter Brunn, author of *The Lesson Planning Handbook*, provided a full day of support for staff as they planned how they would continue to strengthen their adult learning community and identify strategies for planning lessons across the day that integrate SEL and academics. As further evidence of Belmont-Cragin's commitment to integrating SEL into academics, principal Stacy Stewart and her middle-grade teachers decided to implement Making Meaning in grades 3-6. Center for the Collaborative Classroom worked with staff over the year by providing modified lesson study learning opportunities for both Caring School Community and Making Meaning. The year culminated with a "SELebration" that honored Belmont-Cragin's efforts to create a safe, nurturing, and socially and emotionally thriving school community.

I invite you to learn more about this initiative by reading an interview with principal Stacy Stewart about Belmont-Cragin's success story or watching our Belmont-Cragin Classroom Overview video at Inside the Collaborative Classroom, which highlights interviews with those involved in the project and classroom footage from Belmont-Cragin.