

The Stronger I Get, The Stronger I See My Students Becoming

By Ginger Cook | Categories: Uncategorized

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Jenn Carpenter

For the past four years, Developmental Studies Center (DSC) and Oakland Unified School District have partnered to support a growing number of schools as they implement the Caring School Community (CSC) program. This year more than half of the elementary schools in Oakland, 23 campuses in all, are implementing CSC.

East Oakland Pride, a school with 77% of students receiving free or reduced price lunch, is in their fourth year of implementation. Jennipher Carpenter, a kindergarten teacher and Teacher Leader for CSC, recently reflected on her personal growth and changes within the school.

Here's a transcript of what she had to say:

When I began my career as a teacher, my focus initially was, of course, on the academics, as many teachers are prone to do. I was taught in my credentialing program about the affective realm in the classroom, but I didn't fully understand what that meant. I knew I wanted my students to feel good and safe in the classroom, but I was really busy focusing on the academic and the content knowledge I wanted them to have.

But problems kept coming up, and many of the problems were disrupting the students from hearing my lessons because there were a lot of social problems going on among the students. And I began to realize that there was a part of my teaching that was missing.

Change in Students

When Caring School Community came into the school and we began having Class Meetings, I began to realize that my educational focus needed to broaden to include the whole student, and that meant working with the students' social/emotional growth as well their academic growth. That became clear to me when we were doing Class Meetings, and as I became more aware of my own practice around social/emotional learning.

I began to work with my students around some really good foundational skills so they can have more success in listening, speaking, and recognizing their own emotions, and connecting with each other, and connecting with me.

Change in Self

One of the large benefits I have gained from Caring School Community is recognizing that my role as an educator is a strong attachment with my students and a strong bond so that they feel safe with me and they feel safe with each other, and we can create an environment that is conducive to paying attention to the academics. They are very closely related in my opinion and I think many teachers would agree. If you don't have that social/emotional knowledge and awareness, things can distract you from your learning. So it has been wonderful to have CSC and it has really helped me grow in my teaching and working with students.

Change in School and Staff

And I'm seeing it begin to grow throughout the school. We are having many more positive interactions in the hallway, on the playground, and in the cafeteria. Staff has come together in a new way, especially in staff meetings when the whole of the school is there. And we are able to bring issues up and discuss them in ways we hadn't done in the past. I think many adults are beginning to learn their own social/emotional skills in order to benefit all of our relationships and also to model for students and help the students improve their own growth and learning of themselves.

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We also are excited about the great work going on in Jennipher's classroom and throughout Oakland. Her experience mirrors that of many other Oakland educators, who see their own learning impacting that of their students.

What do you think is the biggest impact of attending to social and emotional learning in schools?

If you want to see Jenn with her students, check out some of the video we recorded last year.