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### **Gladstone elementary school showcases trauma-informed education model**

When he started second grade in Gladstone, “Jacob” was living in a car with parents who battled addiction. After attending four schools in two years, the seven-year-old had a history of major behavior issues and a very short attention span. Now, halfway through the school year, Jacob has made a lot of progress. He is bonding with his teacher, making friends, and learning to regulate his emotions. What made the difference is the Culture of Care at John Wetten Elementary School.

In the past four years, the staff at John Wetten Elementary has done pioneering work to build an education model to support students who experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs.

ACEs include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; household substance abuse; adult mental illness; separated, divorced, or incarcerated parents; and domestic partner violence. Many Oregon youths have experienced one or more ACEs. A 2015 survey of 11<sup>th</sup> graders revealed that 43 percent lived with divorced or separated parents, 35 percent lived with someone battling depression, 34 percent lived with a problem drinker, and 23 percent lived with a street drug user.

ACEs impact a child’s life-long physical and behavioral health. They also impact the child’s success in school because of issues like stress responses, behavior, inability to focus, and poor attendance.

“When a child is in survival mode, their natural response is fight, flight, or freeze,” explained Principal Wendy Wilson. “It’s impossible for students to learn in that state.”

Grant funding from CareOregon and MODA enabled Wilson and her team to work with consultants like trauma specialist Rick Robinson and discipline specialist Dr. Jody McVittie to transform school operations and staff understanding of student needs. They call it a Culture of Care.

“Building a Culture of Care in classrooms involves teaching students how their brain works, and how to calm themselves down when they feel stress levels rising,” explained Wilson. “It means building calming and predictable classroom and school routines that make transitions easier not just for students with ACES, but for all children.”

Teaching students how to build self-management and self-control is a key strategy, as is encouraging bonding between adult mentors and students.

Teachers and staff carefully monitor the emotions they project, and understand the impact of that on students. In addition, the school focuses school discipline in a new way: *first connect, then correct*. Using empathy and listening, teachers tune into the reasons behind a child’s

behavior and focus on that first, before moving to corrective action. Through all of these approaches, school becomes a benevolent sanctuary, a safe place for each child.

Gladstone’s Culture of Care is already paying dividends in reduced behavior problems, improved school attendance, and dramatic jumps in state test scores, including gains of 10 to 14 percent in English Language Arts and 8 to 14 percent in math.

Now Gladstone leaders are sharing what they’ve learned with other educators around the state, including a recent conference of the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators and a seven-district ACEs collaborative. Superintendent Bob Stewart carried the message to legislators in Salem, helping them understand this work in hopes of expanding the effort statewide.

“The research is clear: If one child is having a hard day, it impacts each child in that classroom by creating distractions and delays that interrupt learning,” said Stewart. “Because we know this work has a positive impact for every student, our next goal is to expand it to the middle school level.”

**PHOTO: Principal Wendy Wilson explains the Culture of Care developed in a Gladstone elementary school to school employees from six other Oregon school districts.**

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**Gladstone Schools invite applicants for fall 2017**

The Gladstone School District will admit students from outside district borders in the 2017-18 school year. Spots are open in kindergarten through grade 10.

“Gladstone schools are at the heart of our small, close-knit community,” said Superintendent Bob Stewart. “We offer an innovative, whole child education, supporting individual needs while providing a robust academic program.”

Gladstone offers a culture of care, with full-day kindergarten in a unique early childhood center. Elementary school provides weekly classes in technology, music, P.E., and library. Middle school features a 5-day outdoor school, the AVID college-readiness system, and electives from digital media and Chinese to band, Spanish, and building. Gladstone High School offers 36 AP and college credit classes, plus a spectrum of arts and career-technical programs.

Each school will offer opportunities for tours or student shadow experiences starting in February. To arrange for a tour, contact the school office. Applications, due April 1, are available at <http://gladstone.k12.or.us/>. For more information, call Natalie Weninger at 503.496.3935.