

Educators: High dosage tutoring not always pathway to academic success



This new legislation aligns the letter of the new law with the spirit of those past laws: school districts must now adopt the CT School Climate Policy at their Board of Education level, which requires them to focus on improving school climate and work restoratively. stock image

BY PATRICIA A. CICCONE AND JO ANN FREIBERG

Kudos to Gov. Ned Lamont for releasing more than \$11.5 million to improve academic outcomes for students through “high dosage” tutoring. This seemingly welcomed news, however, conflicts with its intended purpose of improving academic success outcomes for our students. It is well reported that students are depressed, anxious and suffer from the trauma of the pandemic as well as Adverse Childhood Experiences, which the American Academy of Pediatrics has identified as the greatest unaddressed public health threat facing

our nation today. Many children are missing basic human needs, prerequisites to being ready to learn, which are keeping them from achieving at high levels.

It is also well-reported that the stress of dealing with these basic needs deficits further traumatizes children and the adults who work with them, impacting our retention of students and staff. Are we not experiencing gross shortages in our education profession, not to mention the abysmal teacher and paraprofessional retention numbers? If our goal is improved academic achievement, where is the support for and education dollars toward meeting the needs of our traumatized students and adults whose numbers are growing?

All learning is relational, an education fact that continues to go unaddressed by those who control education dollars. In fact, Connecticut native son and Yale emeriti, James Comer, M.D., Ph.D., punctuates the importance of this learning imperative in his own words, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” Perhaps more simply put, we know that students cannot learn until they know their teachers and administrators care about them. And yet, far too many teachers believe they are tasked with mitigating learning losses and if they spend time building relationships and creating vibrant communities in their classrooms, they will be sacrificing instructional time and failing their curriculum pacing guides. This is grossly misguided and flies in the face of research.

Building and sustaining positive classroom and school communities fosters better academic outcomes when teachers instruct through the lens of relationship and community building. In other words, there is no need to sacrifice instructional time and academic success to time spent in relational pursuit. These are inextricably intertwined and together represent best teaching and learning practices.

As if research and data are not convincing enough, let’s consider a phenomenon that is both observable and verifiable in schools today. School administrators routinely confirm that teachers who intentionally and/or naturally build high-quality relationships with students (and parents/guardians), as well as high-quality climates in their classrooms are the same teachers who have few, if any, behavior issues and experience the highest academic growth among students. With this irrefutable truth, focus on building relationships and community should be the “theory of action,” the North Star if you will, to achieve better academic outcomes.

Connecticut legislators in collaboration with and in full support of CAFE, CAS, CAPSS, CEA, and other groups, passed potentially life-changing legislation in this past session that should have a positive impact on this gnawing conundrum (teach or build relationships). Buried in the middle of Public Act 23

— 167 (pages 56–67) is transformative “anti-bullying” legislation. For the nearly 25 years that Connecticut has had such a statute, with all good intention, legislators have sought to make schools safer places to learn by attempting to diminish “bullying.” After countless amended versions, reaching this important goal has been no closer.

This new legislation aligns the letter of the new law with the spirit of those past laws: school districts must now adopt the CT School Climate Policy at their Board of Education level, which requires them to focus on improving school climate and work restoratively. This change in focus obligates educators to build relationships and community. Once schools become true joyful destinations, students and the adults who work with them will thrive.

Other states are looking at what Connecticut just accomplished and are in awe. Connecticut is leading the nation by passing such meaningful and transformative legislation. What remains now is to resource this initiative adequately to train those educators who struggle to build relationships and community and work restoratively. Teachers and administrators need to learn how to work this way. High dosage tutoring, supported by \$11.5 million, is not the pathway to academic success for all. The \$11.5 million to train adults to change their practice and work differently is the pathway to student success. All of our futures stand in the balance.

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