

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast "Student Stories: Middle School Experiences with I'm Determined."

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Lee Anne **SULZBERGER**: Hello. I'm sitting here today with students at Gildersleeve Middle School and we're going to talk about their experiences with I'm Determined. We're gonna start now with just some introductions to figure out who all is here.

Dwana **COOPER**: My name is Dwana Cooper and it was awesome to work with this group of students.

STUDENTS: Hello. My name is Mary. Hi, my name is Essence. I'm Eric. My name's Kristen. Greetings. I'm Pezak--Ben Pezak. Hi, my name's (unintelligible). I'm Hayley. Abbie. I'm Alexander. My name is Maxium.

Terry **FLOYD**: Hi. I'm Mrs. Terry Floyd, Professional School Counselor.

Lauren **DUPREE**: I'm Lauren Dupree, Special Education Teacher.

SULZBERGER: And I know we have two new gentlemen here.

SHAMAR: My name is Shamar.

SULZBERGER: Hi, Shamar. Nice to meet you.

CHAD: And my name's Chad.

SULZBERGER: What I would love to start out with, I know it was a while ago that you all spoke at the middle school event, but I want to just find out a little bit from you guys what was that experience like?

MARY: I thought it was a pretty awesome opportunity. I thought it really gave an idea for teachers for when maybe they're teaching their students and how to teach them in their best methods and what the students may use.

SULZBERGER: How important is it to you to be able to share your either One Pager or your Goals Sheets or your Good Day Plan?

ALEXANDER I thought it was important that we, um, got to show to people what we like and what have a hard time with when we're in school or out.

MARY: I thought it would be very important to show our teachers when we go into high school because, you know, they're not gonna be there to help you. Like, you have to come to them. If we have that to show our teachers we can always go up to them and say exactly what we need help with and show them our strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and needs and it'll just help us a lot in high school.

SULZBERGER: Do you guys have any good stories about when you first started working with I'm Determined and how has this experience helped you throughout the school year?

ALEXANDER: When I first started I never heard of it, but when Miss Cooper told us about putting the pictures on there and how we feel and what we do outside of school about to go in school, I thought it might be a great idea to tell the teachers here how I feel and what I do and how, what I have a hard time with, and at first I was nervous, but when I started to... and then when I started my plan, I, I got kind of excited.

SULZBERGER: Those of you that are teachers in here and guidance counselors. How is it when you all hear from these wonderful students about what their strengths, and their needs, and their preferences are? How has that changed what you do as, as educators?

FLOYD: As the school counselor here, specifically the sixth grade, it allowed me to use this particular tool, um, even in a general ed setting, where students were able to identify specific targets, and I was uh, able to integrate the planner with the career interest inventory and then set a goal and map a plan. So it's a great integrating tool, not only with the special ed department, but also with the general ed department. It was very exciting to see.

COOPER: I was really excited to go to IEP meetings where the students had an active role in their IEP. They knew what was being written. They participated in the meeting, and they're able to add to the conversation. That has been the most powerful thing for me. They feel self-determined and they're using the tools and the skills to be able to articulate that to adults, and usually that's an

unnerving thing, like Alexander said he was a little nervous at first, but I've seen the maturity and the growth just since implementing this program this year with everybody.

SULZBERGER: So which tools do you guys find the most helpful?

MARY: I think the One Pager helped me the most. It was the most like me and it helps me because of that. It helped me express myself with my strengths, interests, preferences, and needs.

BEN: The most useful and favorite in my personal opinion is the One Pager because it was a good way to help me express myself and many other things.

SULZBERGER: Hayley, do you have a favorite?

HAYLEY: My most favorite would be the One Pager because it expresses me the most.

SULZBERGER: Has anything really changed with you guys with your relationships with school or teachers?

MARY: I think with the teacher relationship it brings me closer to my teachers because if I feel like they're there for me and they're like my best friend when I need help in school. I love the way it brings me closer to my teachers and brings a better relationship with them.

SULZBERGER: I'd love to hear from, um, the teachers and guidance counselors in the room. How did you guys decide to do I'm Determined?

FLOYD: Well, initially, I was "volun-told" as the school counselor which required a representative on the team. It comprised of a general ed teacher, a special ed lead teacher as well as a school counselor, and we were trained initially back in October with the Department of Education, and it was a wonderful training. It exposed us to other students around the state who had already implemented this program in various school districts and so we...we're very excited about it. Brought it back here. Introduced it to parents, uh, at a parent meeting, uh where these students here were able to create a one day planner and introduce it to parents and they just took away with it and it just kinda grew from there. And so, again, as a school counselor, being able to integrate the...these tools in the classroom also kinda strengthened my skill set and relationships with the students. That one question, "Are you having a good day?" just opens up so much dialogue with the students instead of asking punitive questions. It gives new language to teachers on terms of how to connect with students so I think it's a great piece. Again, we are just, I believe, going to continue to use this for years to come.

SULZBERGER: So what do you students think is the most important thing that teachers should know about their students?

CHAD: I think it's everything, but the most important topics they should really focus on is the strengths and weakness.

MARY: Also, I think along with strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. It's kind of a tough tie between those because you gotta know what your students likes and dislikes because if you don't, you're not gonna know to really make the class enjoyable for them and they won't really have a good time at all when they're in your class, and you want they're...your class to be enjoyable for them.

SULZBERGER: So what would the adults in the room tell teachers or schools that haven't started I'm Determined, but they're interested in it?

COOPER: Well, not only does it give you good information about your students, it's a great ice breaker at the beginning of the year to (SULZBERGER: oh) to get to know the entire student population. Or even if you choose to do it from faculty to faculty--if teachers can do a Good Day Plan and then introduce it to their students--I think it's a great way to do...to get to know who you'll be working with during the year. A piece of advice that I would give is to not be afraid to implement it or afraid of the program because there're so many great supports already in place with TTAC and with other teachers who've already been trained. Just go ahead and step out and use it. It's not so scary once you try, and you can see great...I feel like we've seen great results.

FLOYD: And it's also, from the counseling department, it is a tool and is an additional resource that teachers can use. Umm, again as it relates to student and teacher relationships, and there's nothing like cultivating a true positive relationship, and these tools are in place to do just that. The training is simple. You can tweak it and just add your own personality and style to it. There's no right or wrong way to do it. Just do it! And you'll find that you'll have positive results. And another piece of advice that I would encourage to... to teachers, umm, and even for other professionals--administrators--listen to the students. Hear what they have to say, and then integrate some of the language that this particular program has in place that will help you to open up and also allow the students to open up with the positive questioning and the way that they ask you to ask--inquire about students' feelings and daysthroughout the day. It is a positive, positive tool all the way around.

COOPER: And I wondered if, if people know that you can do a Good Day Plan or a One Pager and you don't necessarily have to talk about it, because we have some students in here who were not interested in speaking, but they definitely worked on the project and worked on their Good Day Plan and their One Pager and that's still information that can be shared (uh hmm) so I don't want them to feel like you have to be this great person who knows how to articulate or communicate out loud, but sometimes having it in writing is still good--good information.

SULZBERGER: That's a really good point, and you know these tools are for you guys to use. I'm curious about the goals sheet because I've heard a lot about the One Pager--and we love the One Pager--but I'm curious about the Goals sheet. How have you used that? What types of goals are you all working on?

MARY: Maybe getting straight A's? 'Cause I've before gotten literally one B and the rest A's. If I studied, because I'm a terrible procrastinator, I would definitely probably get straight A's so I--maybe when I go into high school for my GPA I really want to work on that and try to get a scholarship.

SULZBERGER: And then for your goals then you'd write down like specific steps about ok what do I need to do (**MARY:** Yes)

MARY: Yes. Make a calendar-specific, and, umm, have a specific time like a certain amount of time for studying.

SULZBERGER: Which is the one tool that you will definitely use no matter what school you're at or how old you are? What tool will you use?

CHAD: The two I will use is the Goal and the one planner 'cause when you're doing the one planner and it shows all your weakness and strengths what you can do is sometimes people do their weakness and then they go to the goal sheet and then write on the goal sheet what their weakness is and then try to make steps of it.

UNKNOWN: Umm, I think it would probably be the, umm, Good Day Plan.

SULZBERGER: That one is definitely going to go with you.

MARY: I really like the One Pager and the Good Day Plan, but if I could pick between the two it would have to be the Good Day Plan 'cause I would probably when I'm older like that one a little bit more and outgrow the One Pager. So I would have to say the Good Day Plan.

SULZBERGER: If you had to pick one adjective to describe your involvement with I'm Determined.

HAYLEY: Creative

SULZBERGER: Creative. Fabulous. Chad?

CHAD: Helpful.

ERIC: Accurate

SULZBERGER: Accurate.

BEN: Determined

SULZBERGER: Good words. Other adjectives that describe I'm Determined and kinda how it makes you feel?

HAYLEY: Unique

SULZBERGER: I heard unique.

MAXIMUM: Helpful

SULZBERGER: If you guys could grant some wishes. What wishes do you have for students who are coming to Gildersleeve Middle School who may be like in first or second grade now? What wishes do you have for them as it relates to I'm Determined? Wha-What do you wish their experience would be or what do you wish would happen for them?

HAYLEY: That they would just have as much fun.

SULZBERGER: Same thing for the educators in the room. What wishes do you have for the future of I'm Determined?

COOPER: I am hoping, or I guess I wish, that the eighth graders will mentor some of the middle school students and we talked about it a little bit here with the high school lead and if we could kinda set up some partnerships. These guys are experts so they can kinda help them through the process and be like a peer buddy in high school. That will be my wish. That we can create partnerships so we can keep it going.

DUPREE: I would love to see it grow. That more people become involved and it becomes a bigger part of the just the school environment. Because it is so positive and it is making kids so self-aware that that's really the most important skill that they're gonna need in life is to know what they need and what they can do.

FLOYD: I agree. I wish that it will become school wide. That every teacher would be trained or exposed to it and that every student in the building will have an opportunity to utilize one or all of these tools to help set a positive start with their school year.

SULZBERGER: What a great note to end on. Thanks so much to each of you and I really enjoyed talking with you today.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]