

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast “Lancaster’s Story: Building School Community through Peer-to-Peer Social Skills Modeling” (May 2014)

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

Butler **KNIGHT**: Good afternoon! It is exciting to be here at Lancaster Middle School. I am here with Jessica Davis, who is currently the assistant principal here and had a history of having been at Lancaster Primary School before that, and she's going to share a little bit of that history, and Anna Kellum who is here at the middle school, but also was at the primary school as a 3rd grade teacher and also as the PBIS coach, but is currently working as an Instructional Technology Resource Teacher and instructional specialist here at the middle school, but also for the division. So I've had the privilege of knowing both of you and I have gotten incredibly excited about the ways in which you've connected your PBIS initiative to your social skills program, which I understand really emerged out of the ACE project, which was designed to serve students with autism. So Jessica, if you don't mind, if we could start with you and have you provide some of that background to that program and your involvement at the primary school.

Jessica **DAVIS**: Yes. Hi, Butler. Well, we've been talking a lot about social skills and PBIS, and I'll give you a little bit of background as to where I'm coming from with this. I did teach at the primary school. I taught first grade and second grade, and, um, during that time I had many students with Autism in my class so I learned a lot about the needs of students with Autism and during that time also our school applied for a grant through VCU, VCU ACE, the Autism Center for Excellence, and in that time we developed a program called the Social Skills Fun Club at Lancaster Primary School, and our students with Autism participated in that, and it was run one day a week and the students talked mainly about and learned how to cross some barriers regarding social skills that they had. Um, giving eye contact while talking to people. Uh, not blurting out inappropriate comments. Speaking at appropriate times. So while they were working on all of those skills they would come out into the building and they would practice with staff members that were still there. But a piece of that the-the instructor there wanted to see is they really wanted them to be able to interact with peers of their own age too. So we brought in some students without disabilities, um, students that, that had good social skills (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) and were comfortable in socializing with people and they worked with those kids during the sessions after school during the Fun Club time. And they would practice with them. They would be role modeling while interacting with the kids and no-none of the kids that were there knew who was there, why they were there. They just knew that they were interacting with each other. So that peer modeling piece kind of grew and came out of that social skills club into the classroom some. I think a big piece of that was not only practicing it for the students with autism, but the kids who went in there too took something away from that as well in learning to interact with people differently--people without the same social skills that they had, and I think that carried over into some of our kids at the time who entered third grade last year were some of the kids who participated in that group. Whether they were the students with autism or they were the other kids who came in and participated with them. And they traveled into our third grade and, and had some new ways to interact socially with each other in being leaders and taking the experience of role-modeling and being a leader in

that sense into the classroom and into life in general. Mrs. Kellum and some of the other teachers, hopefully, whether they knew where those skills came from with those kids, could see that those kids were patient and modeled for each other, and understood growing their peers, as well as themselves, and socially interacting in a positive way.

KNIGHT: Yeah. Definitely. And we know just from the research that that modeling and that practice with peers interacting with one another allows those skills that kids are learning to generalize across environments. So I can see how that could have been really successful.

DAVIS: It's real life too.

KNIGHT: Yeah

DAVIS: It's real life for the kids. It's not just we're going to do this here now in this class, but this is--this is how we interact with people everywhere.

KNIGHT: mmhmm

DAVIS: So it really carried over I think and made that transfer for them.

KNIGHT: So it was equally exciting that that program really has lived on beyond your having been there, and Anna, you were there as a third grade teacher when the PBIS initiative was growing and you were the PBIS coach there. Tell us about the ways in which you--I guess you saw the benefits of that program as a teacher in the classroom. Tell me a little about that and then how you took that program and developed it.

Anna **KELLUM:** We did take that program and kind of make it grow. Those students who came to third grade--we were just beginning our PBIS initiative and push for PBIS throughout the school and third grade took it upon themselves to start an ambassador program where we chose students in the classrooms to become leaders in the hallway monitoring--being those students that could help students--other students. So it was really interesting to find out that I had some kids in my classroom as I was teaching and having things happen in my room I noticed that there were some students who became leaders without my push and modeling and expectations. I had those expectations, but somehow those kids were stepping up to the plate as I call it, and they were taking the initiative on their own, and to come to find out they had been in this program and they really had learned, through the social skills club and working and interacting with those other students, how to be patient, and they had that quality of the leadership that we needed. So we chose students to monitor the hallways. They greeted students and teachers and parents in the morning when they entered the building and that was our year. We just put little vests on them and they stood in the hallway and passed out points--star points--to students who were, I guess, modeling or-or using the correct behavior, and you could hear them say, "I like the way you're walking in the hall. I like the way you're whispering." And it was interesting to find out that even though we had been pushing that, those kids already had that background, but the most interesting part was as I was working with some very difficult students I had a few kids who I noticed just automatically knew how to respond without making, you know, a huge deal, and I

noticed that they became even in the classroom peer helpers and ambassadors in the classroom.

DAVIS: And I think because it started small, it wasn't, um, nobody felt like they were different. It just--they kind of all began to work together in leading with that small group, maybe a few more would hop on and (**KELLUM:** and they) a few more

KELLUM: Yes and they mod--they were models so then I noticed other children in the classroom started modeling after them and they--and it wasn't something I was pushing, it was just something that was happening naturally and like you said it was, it's part of life. It's the way we interact outside of school and so it was nice to see that happen in my--our little community in the classroom, and from there our--the school became very excited about the ambassadors and how they were monitoring the cafeteria and the hallway in the morning and the afternoons and how the kids--they just were excited to be ambassadors so everyone was stepping up to--to be a-a role model so they could be picked. We chose to have a PBIS camp at the end of the school year during our June session, which is our remediation and enrichment time, and so we started a little PBIS camp and we chose rising second graders who would be coming to third grade this year and they actually did some great projects with our PBIS rules and procedures and expectations. Uh, they did some technology. They did some books. They did some, uh, movies (**KNIGHT:** Yeah I saw your movies) uh, and so it was great. The best part was they all had to apply (**KNIGHT:** Tell us about...) the position (**KNIGHT:** that)

KNIGHT: That's really amazing. That's like a 21st century skill (**KELLUM:** laughs) at the age, you know (**KELLUM:** Well, we thought it was...) for second graders

KELLUM: ... important even though they wanted to be in the camp that they didn't necessarily mean they were going to be an ambassador next year. We came up with an application and they had to fill out the application. Their parents had to sign stating, you know, they knew the expectations of being an ambassador, but they also had to have two references from teachers from previous years and so it was exciting to watch them bring in their applications. We did the interview process. We actually interviewed these students and then we looked at their applications. It was really interesting to hear them talk about their expectations of being, uh, during the interview. We kind of got an idea of who had the great verbal skills and, and who would be good for certain parts as we're doing. So from there those kids then came up with the ideas of what they wanted to do for the program. So we took our iPads. We brainstormed. We did some writing. We did some reading, and then those kids developed the "this is what it looks like--this is what it doesn't look like" and we practiced that in the classroom and from that point they actually took the iPads out and they videoed and took pictures of "this is what it looks like--this is what it doesn't look like."

KNIGHT: So Anna you were talking about the ambassador social skills program and how you had selected kids through an application process. So tell us some more about how you incorporated the preparation of the kids through your PBIS camp for the roll out of your PBIS program in the fall.

KELLUM: Our students, they decided they wanted to be in the camp. They had to fill out an application and have recommendations. Some of those students were not always your start students. We had even hand-picked a few students that we thought would probably enjoy it, but also get a lot from PBIS--uh--camp.

DAVIS: So kids that lacked some social skills.

KELLUM: S--some kids that lacked social skills. So it was very interesting. I was a little nervous at first because I would have such a---that would be such a diverse group, but it turned out to be wonderful experience. Having those kids who had social skills and some who lacked. They were able to work together. We did some preparation. We knew that in the fall we wanted these kids to be our leaders in monitoring the halls and greeting people at the doors so we did a lot of modeling and practicing and making charts about what it looked like and what it didn't look like and from there they would use--we have technology. We have a one-to-one iPad initiative at the primary school. So each student in the camp received an iPad and they were able to go out and they were tasked with finding and taking videos of students. What it looks like to walk in the hall and students that maybe that's not what it's supposed to look like in the hallway. Um, and so we did that for several days with--with each PBIS area. If it was the bus, we went out to the bus and practiced and took videos about what it looks like to be on the bus. We actually videoed what it doesn't look like on the bus.

DAVIS: And that was a time where a lot of your kids actually modeled for your kids who were chosen (**KELLUM:** Yes) that kind of lacked some social skills (**KELLUM:** mmhmm) to really see (**KELLUM:** Yes) what it should look like.

KELLUM: Our cafeteria was a huge, um, was one of our picks for an area that needed improvement. So we actually spent two days "what does it look like to walk into the cafeteria to sit down at the table--to go through the lunch line to get your snack." All the components of cafeteria time. The kids actually practiced and modeled what it looks like and they each got their iPads and then they practiced on each other and they took videos and then we actually videoed them walking through lines. Those videos were then used and pictures were used to compose eBooks that could be read to the primary school kids. iMovie videos of super heroes that could be played at the beginning of school so that teachers had some support in the PBIS initiative.

KNIGHT: So the primary school is a primary school because you've got pre-K. You've got four year (**DAVIS:** Yes) olds through second grade (**KELLUM:** Yes) or actually through third grade.

KELLUM: Third grade.

KNIGHT: Third grade. So these are young children learning these social skills and having young children model and prompt for those social skills through your school wide locations, which is pretty exciting in an application process as well. You've had some conversations between the two of you of how you want to build that now at the middle school. I think Jessica you were saying those third graders who have been through the social skills training are actually here now.

DAVIS: We've had some of the original kids that Anna was talking about that are our fourth graders now--our new group of kids in our school--and we've kind of revamped our PBIS program this year and trying to get it off the ground and living again. So we've decided to kind of take on what Anna did here at the middle school and have student ambassadors. So it's very new here, but we went with kind of the same concept. We have some students who either previously had some experience in that, or have very good social skills. We also have students who are student leaders. They may need to learn some more social skills or fine tune them. Students follow them and students look up to them and they're the kids who we want--we want to build leadership in them so combining those two groups of kids they become our student ambassadors here at the middle school and we would like to follow a lot of the same steps that Anna did at the primary school too with having them create the modeling videos and the teaching tools so our teacher can use those in upcoming years to model for the rest of our kids in our school, and we want to keep it on that peer level. So we hope to follow of those great things that Anna was talking about here at the middle school and--and use the application process and get some of those things going. We're just not quite there yet. We love the idea of the summer camps. Those kids are getting ready to train the rest of the school the upcoming year.

KNIGHT: And you have almost a combination of elementary through middle school here (**DAVIS:** Yes) because you've got (**DAVIS:** Four through eight) yeah, exactly, so some of these, your youngest children, are children who've been through the camp that you did, Anna, and also the ACE program, Jessica, that you've talked about as well. So you've got that nice foundation here of kids to work with.

DAVIS: Absolutely. Absolutely and we're trying to get some of those kids who were in the social skills club coming out and helping with some of that as well. Some of those kids were the original kids that I was speaking of in the primary school that are here in our school in the upper grades now.

KNIGHT: Well that's exciting. It's exciting how what you've done at the primary school has created a foundation for the kids coming into the middle school that you're gonna take and work with, and (**DAVIS:** Right) developing that social skills program here as well.

DAVIS: It is exciting.

KNIGHT: Well I thank you both so much for your time and thoughtfulness and innovation and taking PBIS and making it work for all kids across all different kinds of settings and will all different kids. Jessica, thank you.

DAVIS: Thank you, Butler (**KNIGHT:** Very much) we're excited

KELLUM: Thank you, Butler.

KNIGHT: Thank you very, very much.

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