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Wilton Public School District: A Full-Service Community School Example

Strengthen ND's *Rural Solutions* Series

Full-Service Community Schools are built upon each community's strengths. Effective Full-Service Community Schools create a shared vision, recognize needs through strong connections with stakeholders, and possess a passion for what's best for students. They involve all sectors of the community – public schools belong to the public. Partnerships across various stakeholder groups are key to the success of the Full-Service Community Schools model. This includes parents, families, school staff, students, neighbors, and local organizations and service providers

Full-Service Community Schools model is based on the fact that barriers, such as hunger, behavioral health, access to early childhood education, and family engagement can often be hindrances to student success. The North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium, a collaboration between the Central Regional Education Association, South East Education Cooperative, and Nexus-PATH, is funded by the US Department of Education and offers financial and other support for five North Dakota schools over the course of a five-year development period. The model promotes the development of partnerships, so that schools don't have to navigate these challenges alone. It is a model that is individualized by schools, based on their student and community needs and assets. There are five Full-Service Community Schools across North Dakota, and the Wilton Public School District is one of them.

There are 262 children within the Wilton Public School District. As a member of the North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium, the school district is reaching more students, families, and the community; working toward reaching ALL students and their families, as well as the community - to create a community hub within the school for Wilton residents to access services, despite its rural geography.

Wilton Public School was named a Full-Service Community Schools Consortium pilot site through a competitive process and initiated implementation of the model in the Fall of 2019. The school district remains committed to continuing and expanding on the work of providing broader support for all students and families, as well as increasing community engagement.





Today, Wilton School District has established partnerships in order to implement the following services:

- An early childhood program that has been successful in providing early intervention for children, particularly through speech and special education.
- A social worker who helps students and families access the services specific to their needs. This service has proven to be very helpful and effective.
- Access to a Registered Nurse, through a telehealth platform, all day, every school day, that provides great assistance in triaging student injury and illness, as well as providing daily support to students with chronic conditions.
- Both Americorps Reading and Math Corps programs that individually tutor students who need some assistance in reaching their goals in either reading or math. Teachers report this program to be very beneficial to students.
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes, as well as a Robotics group that uses technology to teach communications and leadership skills.
- Before and after school programs that are very beneficial to both students and parents.
- A Sanford Mental Health Physician that visits the school every other week, supported through Medicaid.
- A Family Engagement Committee that provides caregiver input and discussion.

An additional program is the development of a coffee shop within the school to provide business and employment skills for students. This program was delayed by COVID. The programs listed above are just the direct services. Additionally, there is a shared vision within the school, increased support for teachers, and increased communication and support within the staff.

A recent survey of Wilton teachers included the following response to the impact of the Full-Service Community School approach; “It has shaped the vision of the school and expanded our perception of what we are able to do.” Superintendent Andrew Jordan adds, “We have a vision for the kids and everything ties to it. This includes the entire district, from support staff through parents and the School Board. Importantly, our Family Engagement Committee is integral to our success to date.”

Superintendent Jordan explains that rather than being fixated solely on academics, they look at the whole child; also teaching them to be critical thinkers, to persevere, to work as a team, and to build leadership skills. Students learn to be better prepared for their life after high school, whether it be workforce, college, or training.

Lyndsi Engstrom, Director of Research, Design and Value for the North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium, indicates that Wilton Public School District is not afraid to try new things and has been able to think differently; focusing on using best practices, while adding important services through partnerships.

Response from a recent survey of teachers regarding the Full-Service Community Schools initiative included the following comments:

- “We are taking the time to look at our students’ needs in a complete picture (home, school, community.”
- “We have seen increased community and school collaborations overall.”
- “We have seen great results from our reading and math corps students. We also notice our kindergarten class coming in with many early learning skills gained from our preschool program.”
- “As a rural community, knowing that we have more opportunities and resources available to our students and families is reassuring.”

It is hard work, though. Superintendent Jordan says, “Our teachers and staff work hard. We are aggressive in applying for grants and we are all committed to supporting the best outcome for each student.” He further states that the most difficult piece is communications. “Communication is often difficult - providing information to parents and the community about our vision and what we are doing.”

A recent community engagement survey indicated strong community interest in fitness classes, adult education classes, and a community nurse/physical therapy services.

Residents suggested students could become members of the various groups around town, including Lions, Women of Wilton, Park Board, Catholic Daughters, and American Legion & Auxiliary, possibly through class credit.

An additional suggestion was for involvement in government, including: 1) Mayor Assistant; 2) Marketing with Economic Development Committee or City Commission; and 3) Park Board Assistant.

Wilton Public School District is a good example of a rural Full-Service Community School.

The North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium strives to support North Dakota schools, like Wilton, in implementing, scaling, and sustaining a Full-Service Community School model.

Strengthen ND is placing stories of community success on its website. One of my areas of responsibilities is to find them, interview community members (particularly those who have deployed community solutions), and compile these stories on our website as examples for other communities. Please contact me with your success story.

