

Ingham Impact Episode 5: Secondary Learning Center & Evergreen Program

I work at the secondary Learning Center and it's a program for high school, severely emotionally impaired students and also students who have behavior issues, and my primary responsibilities is I have the social studies classroom, which covers economics, government, world history and US history. And then I also team teach a conflict resolution class. As a behavior management consultant, most of my responsibility is to deal with behaviors. I run a center room program; some schools may have it as in-school detention, we look at it as center room. It's an opportunity for students who are having behavior difficulties within the classroom, to come and center themselves. I teach students with emotional impairments with the mental health component. So that could involve hearing voices, or some other situation that isn't easily detectable by other people. So we kind of meet the students where they are; we do some assessments when they come in to help them develop some skills to work at being more successful in a more traditional educational environment. Some of those skills could be interacting with other people, being willing to follow the directions, just seeing that success is possible. Some of our students haven't experienced a lot of that, so we try to work very diligently to help them experience that. The beautiful thing about working at SLC is the fact that there is no day that is the same. You cannot leave out of here and say I was bored today, okay, because every day is different. Because kids present different behaviors, different situations, they all come from different environments; we have kids that live out in the country, we have kids that live in the city. All of them present different issues at any given time, at any time of the day, and that doesn't mean that it ends at 2:15, okay. A lot of us have been here until five o'clock dealing with certain situations. Before the day is over, we try to make sure that all situations that were dealt with throughout the day have been dealt with. We always have a processing time period after the kids leave to process: okay, did we deal with this situation okay, was there something that we could do better, and not one staff member here is above not apologizing. Because we are humans, and if we make a mistake then we will address that with that student the very next day. I describe our program as like a mini high school; we have the one hallway, and we have a social studies classroom, we have a math classroom, we have an English classroom, and then we have electives throughout. The students here, even though they do have emotional problems and behavior problems, they are working towards their high school credits, and most students are working for a high school diploma. The typical day starts with some kind of exercise. We do a language arts activity, and then they move to reading or math. The focus, like I said is to work on those social skills while we're teaching academics. Other staff that work with the program work in both classrooms as well so we develop relationships with all of the kids. So if there is a challenge or a success to be celebrated or worked on, then we have the relationship with the students. Every student has a different path, and no one has the same path, and for some, they're going to go on to higher education.

Other students are not and I think this program allows for all students to get what they need. I think if other students are at the high school, that doesn't always happen; they can just be a number, and kind of get lost in the crowd, and I think that the students here get that support. They get the feeling of belonging, they know that there are people out there that are behind them and want to back them, and aren't against them. We have a lot of students who feel like everybody was out to get them, and I think after students kind of settle in here and they develop those relationships, and they build that trust, they feel that they can do okay, and they can be a success, and they can meet their goals. Sometimes the students that come to us have kind of been branded as the kids who aren't going to be successful, so helping the community understand that there is value there; helping the individuals understand that there is value there, and helping them work themselves into a natural situation to be an active part, and an effective part of their community, wherever that is. Once students have education, once someone has an education, we strongly believe that they're going to be an asset in the community; they're more knowledgeable. We also teach the social skills where kids can go out and be acceptable in terms of being able to be polite, be courteous, volunteer, get jobs, take care of themselves, Acknowledge and participate in a community that has supported them all the way through school. So I think it's important that what they get here transfers into the real world.

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