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Pearson Early Learning Center Implements the Pyramid Model to Promote the Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Outcomes of All Children

PEARSON EARLY LEARNING CENTER within Shakopee Public Schools in Shakopee, Minnesota is in its eighth year of implementing the *Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social and Emotional Outcomes of Young Children*. Pearson Early Learning Center serves 431 young children and their families. Pearson began this work to ensure they had the capacity to promote the social, emotional, and behavioral skills of all children in the program.

Almost every early childhood educator will tell you that one of their greatest concerns is addressing the needs of young children with behavior that impacts the child's ability to engage in learning in the classroom. Early educators are concerned not only with managing behavior but also with guiding children's social-emotional development to support the child's school readiness, academic success, and long-term adult functioning. National headlines have raised public awareness about the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline techniques to address the challenging behavior of young children in preschool programs and children of color experiencing suspension and expulsion disproportionately. Pearson is proud that with the Pyramid Model, exclusionary discipline is not used and children are supported to have greater engagement in learning within the school community.

Pearson Early Learning Center offers activities and classes for families to attend with their child, a public preschool program for children ages 3–5 years, after-care services, special education services to children with disabilities within the inclusive preschool classroom, and early intervention services for children birth to three years old. Serving a diverse population of young children and their families, Pearson has four cultural liaisons on staff (Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese) to assist with translation and family support.

It Takes a Team

A leadership team of staff, teachers, and specialists guide the implementation of the Pyramid Model. The leadership team works together on family engagement strategies, providing professional development to classroom staff, ensuring that children with behavior support needs are provided with effective interventions, and using data to examine their implementation and outcomes. The leadership team activities have included:

- Training of all staff, including new staff, in the Pyramid Model classroom practices.
- Peer coaching to classroom staff to support practice implementation and group coaching to support teaching teams as they continue to implement Pyramid practices.
- Providing resources for teachers, children, and families that follow a monthly scope and sequence for social-emotional teaching.
- Creating family engagement materials and hosting family engagement events including developing family resource bags with strategies and materials on various topics for families to use at home with their children.
- Adopting a collaborative team approach (including the teacher and family) to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and develop a behavior support plan for children who need more support.
- Collecting and using data on behavior incidents to problem-solve and provide support to teachers and children.
- Creating systems for staff and student recognition.
- Using fidelity tools to examine program-wide implementation and the implementation of social-emotional teaching practices.

Caring Hearts, Caring Words, and Caring Bodies

Pearson Early Learning Center informs families about the implementation of the Pyramid Model upon enrollment in the program. The program has selected Caring Hearts, Caring Words, and Caring Bodies as their three program-wide behavior expectations.

Child-friendly posters display the expectations throughout the building. The teachers help children understand the expectations and how classroom rules guide behavior that meets the three expectations. Families are also aware of the expectations and receive materials and resources to promote the expectations at home and in the community.

"We are all using the schoolwide expectations in the classroom, building, gym, and hallway. Everyone is using the same words and phrases. It has really brought us together building wide and we are such a close-knit building because of it."

Pearson preschool teacher

Building Teacher Confidence and Competence

Pearson is extremely proud of the growth of their teachers in implementing the Pyramid Model practices. All teachers who have been with the program for more than a year are at high fidelity of implementing Pyramid Model practices. A peer coach supports teachers as they learn the practices and then teachers participate in group coaching to maintain their skills and problem-solve challenges with their peers. A school psychologist and social worker provides structured social-emotional lessons in the classroom and works with classroom teachers to enhance learning across the school day. Every classroom offers a calm-down area, a solution toolkit for solving social problems, and materials to teach emotions and friendship skills.

"I had a child who really had a hard time regulating his emotions, and now he can leave a situation and go to the calm down area…and calm his body down. It has been so helpful for him and the entire class."

Pearson preschool teacher

Training and technical assistance for the implementation of the Pyramid Model is provided by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations funded by the Office of Special Education Programs.

The Pyramid Model is a multi-tiered framework for promoting social-emotional competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children, particularly those with or at risk for delays or disabilities. The framework emphasizes building positive relationships with children and families, creating supportive environments, intentionally teaching social-emotional skills, and individualizing interventions to provide effective behavior support for children who need more assistance.

When Children Have Challenging Behavior

Some young children will engage in behaviors that are not developmentally expected and require additional support and strategies. When a child demonstrates persistent challenging behavior, the teacher engages the support of the Intervention/Support Team. The school psychologist meets with the teacher and reviews the concerns, data, child assessment information, and ongoing intervention strategies. The school psychologist and teacher connect with the family to discuss the child's strengths and concerns at home and school. The team (including the family) then determines the intervention plan strategies, methods for ongoing data collection, and the timeline for following up to review data.

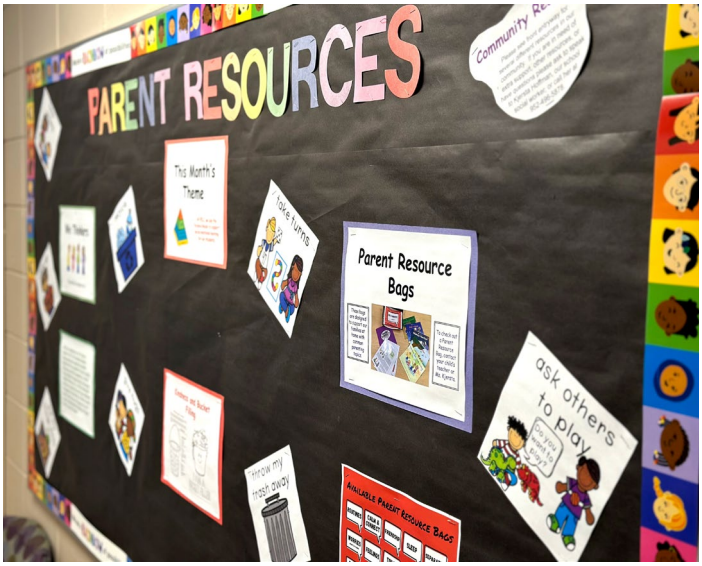
"The process has helped us ensure that our interventions are individualized and chosen carefully based on the child's strengths, needs, and hypothesized function of the behavior. Using clear, ongoing data collection allows us to assess the success of the interventions and measure progress accurately. When individual intervention plans are implemented with fidelity, we see children improve their ability to cope with emotions, connect with peers, and follow the group plan at school."

Cortney Olson, School Psychologist/ Classroom Coach/Leadership Team Member

Outcomes to Celebrate

Pearson Early Learning Center continues its program-wide implementation because they see positive outcomes for their teachers, children, and families. They feel they have the tools to promote children's development of social-emotional skills and effectively support children with behavior challenges. As a result of their implementation, they have celebrated the following outcomes:

- Teacher growth in their confidence and competence in teaching social-emotional skills,
- All children experience growth in social-emotional skills.
- Children with disabilities achieve positive outcomes in emotion regulation, friendship development, and problem-solving skills.
- No use of exclusionary responses to child challenging behavior.
- Ability to provide effective behavioral support for children with more intensive behavior needs.



"I have seen great gains in our special education population in the areas of emotional understanding and regulation, friendship development, and problem-solving… Beyond measure, our students with special needs are thriving in our inclusive environment that is grounded in the Pyramid Model practices, allowing for directed teaching, structured social opportunities, and a collective understanding of a rich social-emotional learning environment."

Katie DeBilzan, Early Childhood Special Education Teacher/Classroom Coach/Leadership Team Member

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