

WILDWOOD ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT
Prepared by Community School Coordinator, Molly McCracken, LMSW
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INTRODUCTION

The Community School strategy during the 20-21 school year at Wildwood was met with enormous challenges and big successes. With Community School Coordinator (CSC) Molly McCracken, in her first year as a community school year and the city grappling with the pandemic, the school year was marked new experiences, flexibility, and perseverance. This report will share some of the highlights of the year.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Mosaic Making

Through a partnership between our Out-of-School Time provider, Access Art, and Clayworks' Community Arts this spring, middle schoolers at Wildwood had the opportunity to create a mosaic from start to finish. Our students chose the phrase "Unity: Together we are stronger" and learned everything from how to make a tile to how to layout and grout a mosaic. The end product is a beautiful piece that our school will treasure and perfectly embodies the CS strategy in the simplest terms. Beyond gaining artistic skills, this activity also enabled students to come together, outdoors, get to know each other, gain leadership skills, and work collaboratively to create a vision they felt proud of.



HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS: Family Stability

The pandemic and virtual learning brought a new emphasis on the importance of health and social supports this school year. Wildwood's CSC, dedicated herself to helping families find COVID vaccines, testing sites and financial and legal supports for various difficulties including custody issues, illegal evictions, and more.

Navigating food distributions became increasingly important this year as everything from budgets to transportation was impacted by COVID. Our CSC helped families navigate acquiring Pandemic-EBT cards distributed by the state, lead a food distribution at the school, and made sure families knew all of the food distribution sites in the area.



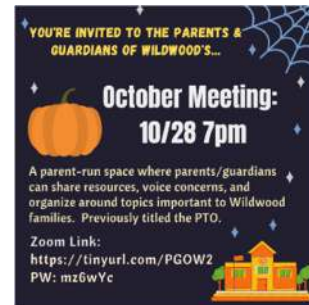
A donation of one hundred \$50 Walmart Gift cards (totaling \$5000) by Chesapeake Employers Insurance brought much-needed aid to families and gave McCracken, a special tool to use to meet Wildwood Families. Contacting families and handing out these gift cards created opportunities to get to have a dialogue with parents and build relationships. More than once our CSC would call a parent referred to them by the mental health team to offer a gift card and they would say "this couldn't have come at a better time" which would allow the CSC to ask how else our community school could support them.

Chesapeake Employers Insurance also helped us kick off a very successful Teacher Appreciation Week with boxed lunches for our 79 staff members on May 3rd.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: Parent Leadership

Beginning in April of 2020, at the beginning of the switch to virtual learning and the pandemic, a parent of a 6th grader decided she wanted to create a place where parents could come together, get updates, problem solve together and connect. Ms. White did this by creating what is now the Parents & Guardians of Wildwood. This space has been used to share resources with parents including the National Aquariums Read-to-Reef program and COVID vaccine locations, discussing issues including grading policies and the nutrition in school meals, and supporting students in-person through a mask donation campaign.

As PGOW continues to develop over the next few years we are excited about increasing participation, offering educational sessions to parents, holding community-building events, and generally building leadership capacity within the parent body.



COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICES:

Collaborative Leadership and Practices is one of the 4 tenants of community schools and inclusion in school-level teams is a big part of that work. Ms. McCracken sat on many of these teams including the School Family Council (Chaired), Attendance (Co-Chaired), Mental Health Team, and the Family Community Engagement Committee. Major strides were seen in the first two of these committees:

School Family Council

The School Family Council (SFC) is made up of various stakeholders including teachers, staff, students, families, and partners. This year, these meetings were well attended, and we were thrilled to have 12 participants on average including members of our Student Government Association (SGA) and 2 consistent parents. Having these meetings virtually made it much more practical for many people to come regularly, especially those that are not generally in the school building.

At the February meeting, our SGA students used the space to express that they felt overwhelmed by the demands of virtual learning and that this was a feeling throughout the student body, especially for our more engaged students. This was an ideal space to voice these concerns because, present, was our

Principal and Assistant Principals, Wholeness Specialist, clinician from the School Mental Health Program, parents, and representatives from our OST programs. These stakeholders were able to ask clarifying questions, strategize with the students to find solutions, and go back to their teams, or families, to find further ways to support students. This was a great example of the value of SFC. Additionally, the subcommittees of this group held quarterly awards nights, virtual family engagement programs and fundraised for PBIS funds, among other successes.

Attendance Team

Attendance is about more than attending school. It's about academic achievement, mental health, family engagement, and family stability. This year it was paramount to make contact with and ensure school attendance for every single student. Like the SFC, the Attendance Team, co-chaired by the CSC, was made up of a diverse team including the Wholeness Specialist,



Educational Associates, Principal, Assistant Principals, School Social Workers, and mental health clinicians.

This team met weekly to review data, set goals, and develop strategies to contact students and increase attendance. Our main strategies were home-visits, auditing zoom reports, offering family stability resources to families, attendance fairs (pictured here), planning incentives, and using targeted outreach to bring students in the building once in-person learning became an option. The percentage of chronically absent students decreased in the 4th quarter to its lowest of the entire school year-- 28%.

Summer programming

Wildwood is a site of both the Extended School Year program for students with special needs as well as Young Audience's Summer Arts and Learning Program. While these programs existed virtually in the summer of 2020, we are thrilled that they are being offered in-person in 2021. As we continue to reengage students after more than a year of virtual learning, these two opportunities give students a way to return slowly, get back to a school-friendly routine and re-develop a strong relationship with Wildwood.

IN-PERSON LEARNING & VIRTUAL LEARNING

This has been an incredibly difficult time in schools everywhere, including and Wildwood. Navigating how to support students and families during virtual learning and then expanding to limited in-person learning has been at the core of the work of the Community School Coordinator this year.

At the beginning of the school year, the CSC was one of the main contacts for students struggling to log onto their computers, navigate technology problems, join zoom classrooms, and clarify expectations from teachers, the school, and the district. For the first month of school, McCracken received, on average, 20+ phone calls or text messages a day regarding these issues. Although these were largely tech issues, they were serious barriers for students attempting to learn, so the CSC had to change gears

and learn how to navigate through them. The CSC and other staff members continued to help families with these issues throughout the school year.



Once March arrived and limited numbers of students were permitted to returning to the building, the CSC became the point person managing in-person enrollment and family communications (using multiple modes of communication including 3 virtual townhalls). With the assistance of the entire staff, especially the attendance team, students with poor attendance, those registered as homeless or ESOL were targeted for enrollment. This brought school wide attendance up almost 10%.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Every 2-3 years community schools in Baltimore conduct a large needs assessment using surveys, interviews, and focus groups with various school and community stakeholders along with other data collection completed by the CSC. Wildwood entered into this process in May of this year and will have a completed needs assessment report by September.

To date, Wildwood has collected 189 surveys and completed focus groups and interviews with 12 individuals. The feedback collected has been incredibly useful. Some of the most frequent themes that arise are the need to increase safety in the neighborhood which individuals believe has become less safe since the beginning of the pandemic, the need to have more recreation options for youth, and the appreciation of the number of resources offered to families by the school. It should be said that the needs assessment process truly benefits from being led by a social worker as social workers are trained to conduct interviews using active listening and unbiased questioning. Social workers are also trained to seek not just the needs of a community or an individual, but the strengths that can be celebrated and built on.

Data Review

Resource Referrals:

Over 375 referrals were made based on the following needs:

- Pandemic-EBT Support
- Technology Challenges
- Supplies including backpacks, coats, and hygiene items
- Individual and family mental health
- Illegal evictions, tenant/landlord conflicts, housing crisis
- Custodial disputes
- Food and supplies related to COVID illness
- Financial difficulties including outstanding utility bills
- Asthma care
- Unemployment

One parent, when asked about how the Community School office and Coordinator at Wildwood has impacted him wrote: *“The community school is so great for the coats, food, and communications for my family and its needs. It has been so beneficial to me, and my wife and we appreciate it dearly.”*

Leveraged Funds: Over \$55,000 in Leveraged Funds

Events: Over 60 events for students, parents, or families totaling over 5000 participants across all events. Events ranged from attendance fairs to virtual parent workshops to holiday read-a-louds.

PARTNERSHIPS

Wildwood has 42 partners in the Baltimore area. During the 2020-2021 school, the following partners were actively engaged:

- Access Art
- Baltimore Urban Debate League
- Boardroom Chess
- Carpe Diem Arts
- Chesapeake Employers Insurance
- District 8 Council Member’s Office
- Domesticity Fabric Store
- Enoch Pratt Free Library, Edmondson Branch
- Give n’ Grow Basketball
- Holistic Life Foundation
- Maryland Food Bank
- Lawyer in the Schools, Maryland Legal Aid
- National Aquarium
- Operation Prevention
- Parents & Guardians of Wildwood (PGOW)
- Port Discovery
- Red Wiggler Community Farm
- SALA Young Audiences
- Southwest Community
- Turnaround Domestic Violence Center
- UMB Breathmobile
- UMB School Mental Health Program
- UMB School of Nursing
- UMB URec Fit
- Young Successful Leaders

A Few Partner Highlights are as follow:

We were delighted to celebrate our partners with a **Partner Appreciation Ice Cream Social** in June. It was great to be able to share thoughts of appreciation about each partner and present them each with certificates. We hope to be able to make this a tradition at Wildwood. The photo to the right shows Ms. McCracken presenting an award to Jenny Nance of Maryland Legal Aid at the event.



UMB School Mental Health Program

Wildwood Coping Together
Groups for Middle Schoolers
WHO: Students in 6th to 8th grade who may benefit from discussions of self-care and coping strategies to deal with feelings of anxiety, sadness, isolation, and fear related to altered home, school, and social lives.
WHEN: Starting in March
WHAT: 7 weeks, on Zoom, Wednesdays from 9:00-9:45 am
LED BY: Jennifer Lease, LCSW-C, Mental Health Clinician
Visit link to sign up your child!
<http://bit.ly/CovidGroup>

This program engaged over 70 students this school year in individual sessions and grade-level supports including a COVID support group and a grief support group. The School Mental Health Clinician, Ms. Lease, is an active member of our School Family Council and Attendance Team. As a member of our Attendance Team, Ms. Lease responded to our family’s needs by engaging with attendance outreach to connect and resolve barriers.

Jennifer Lease, Clinician with UMB School Mental Health Program attests: *“Being part of a community school means having a reliable person to help the families I work with get the resources they need. I am able to get referrals from someone attuned to the community and aware of how mental health supports could enhance their functioning.”*

Access Art

Our primary OST partner, Access Art has consistently maintained quality programming throughout the school year despite budget cuts and enrollment challenges due to the virtual environment. They are always ready to bring a new project or idea and work with our school team to enhance the student experience at Wildwood. This Spring they added a 1x week drop-in session for students as well as partnered with Clayworks on a mosaic project described earlier in this report. Access Art is more than an art program. Families come to Access Art with real needs, and they support our students through personal challenges.

Tiffany Jones, Site Manager, and Director of Programs and Equity Initiatives attest: *“Community schools are a family. They are the epicenter that aids in creating, sustaining, and supporting communities. Families thrive with access to the resources, and community schools have the ability to provide that not only helps them overcome challenges and barriers.”*

District Gender & Sexuality Alliance

Initiated by our CSC and Wholeness coordinator, and requested by our students, we also partnered with the district's Gender & Sexuality Alliance team to being the process of having a GSA/Diversity group here at school to support inclusion at Wildwood and some of our LGBTQIA identifying students.



IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Wildwood’s Community School Strategy maintained and built family engagement, strengthened student outcomes, and brought in new opportunities for students and other stakeholders. With the 2020-2021 school year behind us, we are excited to build on these experiences and continue to find success in the coming school year.