30 Minutes to Care

One middle school's flexible period gets students involved in activities beyond the classroom

By Renee E. Warner

One of the priorities of Buckhannon-Upshur Middle School is to create an atmosphere in which students are safe and encouraged to explore both academically and socially. Several years ago, I, along with the rest of the school's leadership team, worked together to find the best way to do this for our students.

During our meetings, we identified four areas that could help us accomplish this goal: clubs, advisory, remediation, and enrichment. We named it CARE, and we worked a 30-minute period into the master schedule to help us meet this priority.

The CARE period takes place within the school day, immediately following the final lunch shift. Here's what each section does:

Clubs

Club days are held every Friday. Clubs are an opportunity for students to make a connection with an adult at the school other than their main teachers in a nonacademic setting.

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Clubs need supplies, of course, and principals need funding to get those supplies. That's where I come in, looking at our budget to find ways to sustain these clubs and provide them with the supplies they need.

Teachers choose which clubs they wish to sponsor, and all but three of our 65 teachers have signed up. Students get to pick the clubs they'd like to join, listing their top five selections. Once the administrative team reviews each student's preferences, they're placed in one of those five clubs. We do our best to ensure that the students get to join what they list as their first or second choice.

Students have options such as the Agriculture Club, Recycling Club, Rubik's Cube Club, School Spirit Club, and Dance Club—a truly diverse selection of clubs sure to suit their interests. The result has been astounding to watch, as students and teachers who might not have connected otherwise are fist-bumping in the hallways because they danced a routine together at the recent pep rally.

Advisory

On Mondays, all students meet in Advisory with a teacher they keep for the three years they attend the middle school. School counselors provide each student with an advisory lesson, which usually includes discussion opportunities to help students feel more engaged. Lessons range from instructions for an upcoming school event to behavioral guidelines framed within our positive behavioral interventions and supports program, Buccaneers SAIL. Advisory groups help out with events such as door decorating for Red Ribbon Week and the tallying of Kindness Acts, which are announced at the Rachel's Challenge Field Day every spring.

Remediation and Enrichment

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are Remediation and Enrichment days. During the CARE period on these days, teachers can extend learning within their curriculum, provide tutoring, or allow students to make up schoolwork or tests they missed. Students who need Tier 2 instruction in math or English language arts are provided that instruction with grade-level content teachers. All groups receive weekly basic skills review in math and English language arts on alternating weeks, with lessons provided by teachers in those departments. Students are placed with grade-level teachers on these days.

Occasionally, the school curricular teams use Remediation and Enrichment days for special team events; one has an annual showcase of student talent. Other teams use the time for reteaching expectations in order to improve student behavior. Students also are permitted to use this time to work on entries for art and writing contests.

Alignment from middle-level education to high school is important in student success. We designed the CARE structure to mirror a similar structure the high school uses, offering students continuity as they move to the ninth grade.

The CARE period allows students to reap many benefits they otherwise might not experience in the classroom. It's become a way to hold grade-level and schoolwide events without disrupting much of the academic time frame. Speakers on topics such as cyber safety can also be scheduled during this time, with other class periods shortened by only a few minutes to accommodate.

CARE offers a valuable structure to Buckhannon-Upshur Middle School. The leadership team and I work annually to reflect on the purpose and effectiveness of the class period, and we continue to find it beneficial for everyone at school—teachers and students alike. P

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