

# Proactively Supporting the Well-Being of ALL Staff Members, Students, and Parents



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A critical part of leadership and accomplishing the goal of education is the creation of and adherence to a shared mission, vision, values and goals. These are the foundational principles upon which a school must be built in order to truly be sustained over time. These statements and components of a successful school must be shared with all stakeholders of a school community regularly. The mission, vision, and values for a school also create the foundation for every decision made by school leaders. The leader should consider them as the foundation and filter for every decision made for the organization. The statements narrow the focus of the school organization to a few key vital behaviors that have great leverage for progress.

We were fortunate to open Apple Valley Elementary as a new school six years ago. In the beginning, we gathered as a faculty to articulate a shared mission and vision for the school. Then, collectively we wrote the values, or collective commitments, we were willing to make to each other in order to reach our mission and vision. Our shared mission, vision, and values have truly served as guides as to how we act and the behaviors we exhibit each day, even every moment, while at the school and outside of the school. These guiding principles have helped create and maintain a school culture of learning, positivity, and collaboration.

Our goal is to be known as a school that is welcoming, safe, and nurturing with a focus on student success. We believe that proactively supporting the well-being of ALL staff members, students, and parents is one of the key values needed to accomplish our goal. With this as a focus for the past couple of years, we have experienced some of the most meaningful learning and caring moments of our lives. Throughout the school years there has been evidence of staff members and students looking out for the well-being of others. I would like to highlight some of these standout moments and the impact they have had on our school community.

## Holiday Season

During the holiday season, it is absolutely amazing to see and feel the outpouring of understanding and love freely shared with all members of our school community. Our office staff works closely with teachers, community resources, and the school counselor to become aware of the needs of community members and specific students. Once these needs are assessed, the available resources are connected to fill those needs.

During the month of December our students and community donated items each day to our holiday drive. Their donations included food items as well as new clothes, toys, and blankets. Our student council members spent time each day organizing our holiday drive room where they sorted the items to prepare for families in need. After a couple of weeks of gathering donations, families came in and were able to take items based on their need in a respectful and confidential manner. The student council members were so excited to be part of such a meaningful and impactful experience in the community. The families who came to the school to receive needed items were extremely grateful and expressed their thanks for a school that is so kind and generous. Each year we have been overwhelmed with the generosity of others to help take care of the needs in our school community including those who do not have children attending the school. This year we had a parent reach out to us to provide seven turkeys for individual students and their families. This Apple Valley parent partnered with a local business to help make this happen. We had a wonderful experience as a leadership team and office staff delivering these turkeys knowing they were appreciated. Two full Thanksgiving meals were donated to families in need by another outside organization who knew of our desire to help support the well-being of our school community. Each of our third grade students created Christmas tree ornaments used to decorate the Christmas tree in our town's local bank. This was a great experience to show students that the little things they do can brighten the day for many members of the community as they visit this local business.

Another local business donated seventeen pairs of shoes for students and parents in need. Our teachers and staff submitted names of students that they noticed may need a new pair of shoes. We then contacted the parents of those students to better understand needs and their child's shoe size. When students receive their shoes they are so excited and happy to have them. Parents are also appreciative and grateful for the thoughtfulness and generosity of the community and the school.

### **Community Connection**

During the beginning of the school year a community group of volunteers gathered, organized, and delivered 400 sack lunches to the school for students and families in need. These lunches were dispersed throughout the school community to selected families and individuals.

Parents see the need to support the well-being of students and volunteer many hours of their time to support students in the classroom with what they need to be successful. These parents assist regularly with our extracurricular clubs as well. We have a chess club and robotics club which requires the help of over twenty parents on a regular basis while the clubs are running from January to April. Each month, the PTA celebrates Students of the Month from each grade. They share the goal to help foster student well-being by individually honoring as many students as possible.

Our local fire department regularly meets with classes and grade levels to teach and practice skills with students and teachers. They host an annual coloring contest where six students are selected to tour the fire trucks and take pictures with the department.

Our police department regularly visits the school to connect with students and teachers and to ensure the protection and safety for the school community. They are a big part of our annual Hero Night—a community event where they volunteer to present their career to students and families for an evening.

Many local restaurant businesses invite our school students and parents to eat at their restaurant and have a percentage of the income donated to the school to support the various activities and great learning experiences we have at the school.

### Staff Involvement

Our staff—from student custodians to administrators— have taken the initiative to support the well-being of their coworkers. We frequently see teachers anonymously deliver gifts, favorite drinks, and notes of encouragement. They help one another create last minute sub plans when necessary. They are a listening ear when one is needed and they are each other’s cheerleaders too. They work to foster a culture of caring each day.

Our lunch staff are close friends with a supportive camaraderie that spills over into their interactions with students. Our custodian collaborates with the teenage student sweepers each week to discuss how their jobs fit into our mission, vision, and values. He cares about and shows an interest in their lives making sure they are always included in staff social functions.

Our office staff support one another by showing interest in one another’s lives. They sometimes attend each other’s family events or interact socially outside of work. They start each staff meeting by celebrating what is going well in the school to maintain a positive culture.

### Conclusion

Proactively supporting the well-being of ALL staff members, students, and parents has made a profound difference in the lives of all school community members at Apple Valley Elementary. It is a great gift to be a part of a school community that stays focused on what matters most to impact student achievement.

