

Our Wellness Room

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I was a skeptic. “Do we really need a wellness room?” I had heard about wellness rooms in other schools but wondered if they were really worth the resources (i.e., the space, the money to create the room, and the people to run it). I knew we needed something, however, to help students regulate their emotions. With only a part-time counselor, so much of my time had been spent dealing with students who were angry or upset, and they didn’t know how to calm themselves down. More than once I had wished I had a counseling degree. I began thinking about how and where I could put a wellness room in my school. Two things helped this happen: (1) I had two half-day kindergarten teachers willing to share a classroom, (which would free up a classroom), and (2) the district offered a grant for a couple lucky schools to help buy furniture and supplies for a wellness room. When we received the grant, we began to create our room. (I know other schools who use half of a room or even a small closet-type space so I recognize it doesn’t have to be an entire classroom).

The goal was to make the room NOT look anything like a classroom. After the room was furnished and the supplies purchased, the students were trained. This is the procedure:

- The students take the pass from their classroom teacher and go to the wellness room.
- When they arrive, they check in by signing in and circling how they are feeling at the moment.
- They take a 10-minute sand timer, pick a calming tool, and choose a place in the room to sit.
- After the 10 minutes, students check out by circling how they are feeling then.
- They return to class.
- Students were trained so they know that they must make up any work missed while in the wellness room (this alleviates the problem of students wanting to escape work by going to the wellness room).

I’m a believer now. Our room is worth the precious space and the other resources. We have found that it is doing exactly what we needed it to do. It is a quiet space designated for helping students regulate their emotions and manage stress. We have seen many students benefit from having this additional support during the school day, and they are learning to build important self-regulation skills.

This is what we hear from students after they use the wellness room:

- A boy said, "I feel better when I come here."
- A girl said, "The sand garden helps me calm down."
- A girl said, "I like coming here. It feels different than my classroom."
- A boy said, "I wish my house had a wellness room."

My lunch secretary even stops in the wellness room for a few minutes every day after the busy and noisy lunchroom.

This is what one of the wellness paraprofessionals said about the room:

"Students come here sometimes feeling very sad or upset. Some have red eyes, tear streaked faces and heads hung low. After 10 minutes with the activity of their choice, there are visible physical changes. Their disposition has improved. Their breathing is even. They are calm. Most of them leave smiling! It is impressive to watch self-regulation in action. The ability to identify their emotions and then do the work required to shift their emotions to something more comfortable, is a vital skill. Teaching students about their emotions and subsequent behavioral choices is an essential element of their education. The wellness room provides the opportunity to return to the optimal window of learning. We are educating students on how to be introspective learners."



