
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

Evergreen Elementary School
Bethel School District
Spanaway, Washington

Transcript: No Excuses

Jamie Burnett, Principal: So here at Evergreen Elementary we serve a very high needs school. In fact we are about 70 percent free and reduced and that doesn't stop us from the academics and the rigor that we expect of our students.

Holly Weik, Kindergarten Teacher: We were a failing school and we stayed that way for a while and we figured out that we were blaming everybody but ourselves - the parents, the students, you know, our lack of funds, you know, you name it we, we blamed everything except finally we decided to take the blame ourselves and change our minds about how we went about things.

Lynn Taylor, Fifth Grade Teacher: We decided to go to a conference in San Diego for no excuses and turnaround schools. And it really acted as our springboard when we left there of how we can make a change here at Evergreen.

Shelly Fendel, Third Grade Teacher: So the key elements of No Excuses University is that all students will have the opportunity to go to college if they choose to, they will be ready, and so a big part of that is putting the responsibility on our students making sure that they understand that they can and will go to college if they choose to. Sometimes the high expectations and the rigor at this school is hard for students to adjust as well as parents, especially I'm remembering a parent, they were just really surprised at the high expectations in the rigor and then by the next conference the parent was completely on board seeing this transition in their student and realized how great it is for their child to understand that their education is their responsibility.

April Mullins, Evergreen Parent: One of the ways that Evergreen that has helped me as a parent is that it has always been hard for me to see my children come out of their comfort zone, be out of their comfort zone, and Evergreen Elementary has helped me see how good it is to kind of push your children beyond their comfort zone so they can see what they really are capable of achieving.

Kelsi Durr, Associate Administrator: I think just the high expectation for the kids, you know, no matter what's happening at home or where they come from. We know that they can do well, we know they can achieve and so when they're here we hold them to that. Our staff is really good at establishing that behavior part first so that they have time for the academics. They're not wasting time in class addressing all of these problems that could occur because the students are on task because they know that's the expectation in the building.

Thu Ulloa, Kindergarten Teacher: We start with setting the expectation, of course, because students aren't going to be able to meet an expectation if they don't know what it is. We set goals for their learning and Reading Writing math and we hold them accountable to meet their goals. We look at our data together. We look at our goals and our data. So then we talk about how we can help each other help our friends reach those goals so that we can be 100%.

Shelly Fendel, Third Grade Teacher: Each child needs more than just one teacher to make them successful. So we all communicate and collaborate to help each student get what they need. Whether it's academics Behavior attendance. We have all these programs in place to help each student instead of just one teacher being in charge. It's all, they're all of our students. It's not just my classroom.

Lynn Taylor, Fifth Grade Teacher: We went from being the number 15 School in the district out of 15 elementaries to number three, and we've just slowly progressed since then. And in order to sustain that through different principals and of course colleagues who've retired or moved elsewhere, in our interviews, we really press upon what's important to us and how we do things at the school. We do talk about in our interviews that if that doesn't sound like something they're interested in doing that this is not the school for them.

Shelly Fendel, Third Grade Teacher: What helped me was the staff did put together essentially a list of expectations what they're looking for in a principle how they want to keep sustaining all of this success. Like any new person that comes to evergreen on staff learning about the no excuses University was priority. Every staff member that is hired on here at Evergreen does go to either the local conference or the National Conference for no excuses University.

Ginette Rabon, Second Grade Teacher: We have to look at the systems that we have and we have to say these are important to us. These are the things that have made us who we are and it made our kids so great. We have to sustain those. You know, you're not going to stay the same forever. I think you have to look at the things that really worked and keep those and then be willing to look at new things that could enhance that. I think that's the only way you can sustain something like this.