



SOUTH ST. PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS BECOMES THE FIRST K-12 BARR SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE NATION

BUILDING ASSETS, REDUCING RISKS (BARR)

This year, thanks to a three-year grant from the Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation, South St. Paul Public Schools will implement the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) model districtwide.

BARR is a strengths-based educational model providing schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students through the power of data and relationships.

For the last four years, the BARR model, in conjunction with the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program and a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework, has positively impacted ninth- and tenth-graders. These programs work to build on the assets of students and reduce any risks that might become barriers to their learning. After three years of implementing the BARR model, South St. Paul High School's graduation rate experienced a 6.4 percent increase. Additionally, the percentage of ninth-graders with one or more F's decreased by 22.5% over the past year.

"[BARR] is not just another thing. This is the real thing," Kari Aanenson, humanities teacher at South St. Paul High School, said. "It's what everyone should be doing in their classrooms."

FOCUSING ON THE WHOLE STUDENT

Teachers trained in the BARR framework know how important it is to check in on students' academic, social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Children bring their whole selves when they walk into a classroom. BARR educators recognize that when they focus on every dimension of a child's experience, each aspect influences the others.

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**KJIRSTEN HANSON
SSPPS BARR COACH**

"When you build relationships, you get to know the whole student," said BARR coach, Kjirsten Hanson, who's been working with South St. Paul for four years. "By knowing the whole student, you get a better idea of how to tailor the learning to meet each and every student's needs, including their emotional, social and academic needs."

"I had a student who was failing all of her classes. Instead of calling the parent right away, I ended up sending the kid a text," Aanenson said. "Then we talked on the phone. She just needed someone to push her and say they were proud of her. She needed that reassurance. Now she's passing all of her classes except one."

In that example, Aanenson was able to determine the child's emotional needs and meet them. By doing that, the child was able to engage in their schoolwork again.

BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

By putting relationships first, the BARR model allows students and teachers to connect more powerfully with each other. A key component of the BARR model is the weekly lessons focused on helping students learn and practice life skills. Called “I-Times” or “U-Times,” these lessons focus on building skills in self-management, communication, social, research, or thinking; SSP staff, students and families recognize these as the International Baccalaureate Approaches to Learning skills. Some of these lessons might be around building empathy, handling grief, setting goals, and resolving barriers. The “I-Times” and “U-Times” are opportunities for each student to build stronger relationships with their peers and teachers by diving deeper into real-life problems and creating spaces where students can reflect.

“In one of the I-Times I led, the 9th-grade students wrote a letter to their senior self. They wrote about themselves,” Aanenson said. “It helped me to see what they were interested in and cared about. If you build up that trust, then you can really grow that kid and they know that people have their back and care about them.”

It’s not just the relationships that teachers and students have that matters. The relationships between teachers and administrators are also strengthened through BARR. Teachers join cohorts where they can regularly check in on students’ strengths and collaborate on how to connect with each student. Administrators and teachers also come together to develop strategies to address the risks students might have.

“The teachers talk to each other and get support from one another in a way that they hadn’t before we implemented BARR in our building,” said South St. Paul High School Assistant Principal Angie Ryter. “Just watching the growth and watching the change in adults has been really exciting.”

REDUCING RISKS

Risks, or barriers to learning, can be anything. It might include stressors or uncertainties due to the pandemic, trauma inside or outside of school, self-harm, relationships or even checking out of school.

“With the pandemic right now, more kids might have more needs,” Aanenson said. “We keep checking in and making sure kids are doing okay.”

In addition to checking in, teachers are getting creative with the “I-Time” or “U-Time” lessons. The virtual experience might include some activities with visual components and could involve using some innovative technologies. Desirae Demmings and Elizabeth Zender, language arts teachers at South St. Paul High School, created Flipgrid videos, a video discussion technology, so students could respond to their peers’ videos and engage that way.

“We are trying to reduce their risks,” Aanenson said. “We are trying to make sure kids become better humans and don’t go down traps.”

ROLLING OUT BARR DISTRICTWIDE

Staff district-wide in all schools in South St. Paul Public Schools will learn more about the BARR model over the coming months. The rollout will start slowly this year at Kaposia and Lincoln Center elementary schools and at SSP Middle School, grades 6-8. This ensures staff and students are well supported during the pandemic and while in distance learning.

“The BARR model matches well with all of the core programming that we believe is best for kids,” Superintendent Dr. Webb explained. “We are excited to continue this work at the high school and reinforce our efforts across the district using this significant grant to support the work.”

“We are so grateful to be the first K-12 BARR district in Minnesota,” Chad Schmidt, director of learning at South St. Paul Public Schools, said. “BARR enhances so many things we are proud of here at the district: our equity work, creating multiple-tiered systems of support for kids and our International Baccalaureate programs. This system and structure builds on everything we are doing and gives us the tools we need to keep improving.”

