

Resilient Youth Initiative

The United Way of Will County was recently named the recipient of a federal grant which will allow them to bring the Resilient Youth program to interested public and private schools across the county at no cost for the purchase of curricular materials or training. Resilient Youth is a research-based program which provides students with coping skills aimed at reducing stress and building resilience while helping them to reach their full potential.

What is the Resilient Youth Program?

For over 25 years, the Resilient Youth program has provided educators and families with research-based methods to promote wellness and reduce stress in young people of all ages. The Resilient Youth program can support K-12 students who are dealing with both the normal everyday stress of childhood and adolescence while also providing tools to help students who may be having some challenges with anxiety or depression. For all students, Resilient Youth can significantly improve health and quality of life by equipping students with skills to help them deal with stress—in a social situation, in a classroom or on an athletic field or performance hall. Resilient Youth is a research-backed program--developed by clinicians from the Harvard Medical School, Child Resiliency Program at Massachusetts General Hospital and the Benson-Henry Institute. Since its inception, the program has been well received by thousands of educators as well as by children of all ages from diverse backgrounds. At its core, Resilient Youth encompasses a comprehensive, yet easy to implement curriculum, that will provide your students with coping skills to manage stress, build resilience, and reach their full potential.

What are the goals of the program?

Just as athletes who work hard at practice improve in sports, students who benefit from understanding how to engage in relaxation techniques are good at responding to and recovering from the stress which is a part of everyone's life. By understanding these techniques, students can:

- Reflect on their emotions and better control their impulses
- Cope with emotions such as fear, frustration, and anger
- Relate to others in more empathic, compassionate ways
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Improve academic performance
- Develop better work habits
- Improve memory
- Increase self-esteem

How is the curriculum structured?

There is no single model for how schools deliver the Resilient Youth curriculum. The great thing about the program is that each district can decide how best to offer this experience to meet the needs of their students while best fitting it into their existing schedule and curriculum. This teach-the-teacher program provides school staff with mind/body skills and provides pathways for delivering these interventions directly to students. Once trained, staff members are able to teach these skills to students throughout their careers. The program works with schools to customize

the training to the needs of their particular students and school. Schools also have the opportunity to receive on-going support and additional training.

Some schools incorporate Resilient Youth into homerooms or individual subjects like physical education, health, English or/and advisory period. Others have members of the student support team go into classes to deliver the curriculum. The choice is completely left to the district to determine what structure best works for their individual learning community.

In all cases, the educators delivering the curriculum will bring coping skills and life management tools into the school environment to help students better manage daily stress, and positively impact their academic performance, health and well-being. The curriculum includes the following:

- 6 core prevention-based resiliency lessons which are 30-45 minutes each are at the center of the curriculum. In addition, there are 6 supplemental lessons which schools can choose to implement to reinforce the core lessons and provide students with additional coping strategies. Teachers are given time to plan for these lessons as part of the training program.
- In addition to these sessions, the program provides a multitude of short, 2 to 3-minute activities that are incorporated into the school day between each session to reinforce the concepts learned and help students build a consistent practice.
- All members of the school community are encouraged to take advantage of teachable moments which can link the lived experiences of students to the lessons they are learning as part of the curriculum. What better time to discuss the stress of tests and reflect upon tools which can help students perform at their best than before and after an important test? The examples of how to link these lessons to the everyday experiences of students are limitless.
- Districts may also choose to include an overview of the Resilient Youth program as part of their outreach to parents and members of their community.
- A survey of trained staff will be utilized to assess the effectiveness of the program.

How is this professional development structured?

The Resilient Youth Teach-the-Teacher program brings relaxation response-based coping skills and life management tools into the school environment to help educators and students better manage daily stress, and positively impact student's academic performance, health and well-being. The program is an interactive, 10-hour training that is scheduled in coordination with participating schools. Training is offered to groups of up to 25 educators.

In addition to an overview of the program, the training allows time for teachers to come together to plan for the delivery of the program in a way that best meets the needs of their students. This is not a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Teachers have the opportunity to customize their plans to meet the unique needs of their students and incorporate Resilient Youth into their content areas and other Social-Emotional Learning initiatives.