

NYKids 2026 Positive Outlier Elementary School Study



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Cuba-Rushford Elementary School Case Study

I love working here . . . It really feels more like a family than other places I've been.
— support staff

I think we're very welcoming . . . we're a very warm and loving school, really. I think everyone is treated with respect, everybody is valued.
— teacher

Study Background

For over two decades, NYKids has been studying positive outlier schools to identify what is associated with their above-predicted student performance. This study seeks to identify promising practices in support of K-6 children's development. As in all NYKids research, we characterize important contextual information including the district and school culture and climate; additionally, this study then focuses attention on four main lines of inquiry: academic learning and programming; social emotional learning and youth mental health; educator preparation, support, and organizational capacity; and family engagement and community relationships.

Scores on New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (where applicable) and rates of chronic absenteeism for grades 1- 6 were used to identify positive outliers in this study.

School Context

Located in Allegany County, Cuba-Rushford Elementary School (CRE) is a rural school serving grades K through 5. The school district is geographically large, encompassing over 150 square miles following the merger between Cuba and Rushford, which occurred in 1991. Since that

time, according to the superintendent, student enrollment – as in many rural areas – has slightly waned, causing budgetary and logistical challenges. Within the district there are 13 small towns, including Cuba, where visitors can find a main street decorated by hand-painted murals, quaint eateries, and an artisan cheese shop. Although residents may have to travel over 40 minutes to find larger stores or other amenities, the quiet and close-knit community – as well as two scenic lakes just miles from the school – are sources of enjoyment for those who live in the district.

As reflected in the proportion of economically disadvantaged students (see chart below), poverty is a concern for many families in the school district. Educators at Cuba-Rushford see their roles as holistically supporting students by providing engaging and relevant academic offerings as well as social-emotional learning programming and mental health resources. This sentiment extends to family members as well, who are treated by educators as equal partners and invited to collaborate with the shared goal of improving their children’s educational experience. The school also serves as an important site to bring together families and residents for events, extracurricular activities, and athletic programs.

Student Demographics 2024-2025: Cuba-Rushford Elementary School			
	Cuba-Rushford Elementary School	Cuba-Rushford Central School District	New York State
Grades Served	K-5	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	327	683	2,421,491
Economically Disadvantaged	61%	56%	60%
Students with Disabilities	23%	21%	20%
English Language Learners	0%	0%	12%
Student Ethnic/ Racial Distribution			
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0%	0%	1%
Black or African American	0%	1%	15%
Hispanic/ Latino	4%	2%	31%
Asian/ Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%	11%
White	94%	94%	39%
Multiracial	2%	2%	4%
Other	0%	0%	0%

Cuba-Rushford Elementary School was selected for this study due to its exceptionally strong performance across both academic achievement and student attendance within a high-need, rural context. The school serves a student population of which 61% are economically disadvantaged and 23% are identified as students with disabilities. CRE demonstrates markedly higher-than-

predicted outcomes, with a combined academic z score¹ of 2.24 and an attendance z score of 2.12, resulting in a composite z score of 2.18. This level of performance positions Cuba-Rushford Elementary School as a clear positive outlier, offering a case for understanding how strong outcomes are achieved in geographically isolated and resource-constrained settings.

Highlights

Creating a Culture of Communication and Collaboration

[We're] here to serve every student every day and trying to create a good culture where people can share concerns.
– superintendent

The culture of Cuba-Rushford is nurtured by high levels of collaboration among educators, leaders, and students' families. School and district leaders, for instance, utilize forms of distributed leadership that invite feedback and input from staff members on important decisions, while scheduled meeting times throughout the week allow teachers and support staff to meet regularly to discuss new initiatives or monitor students' progress. These processes – along with the additions of key district-level positions (e.g., a district principal and professional learning leader) – have also bolstered alignment across grade-levels and school buildings. Finally, educators at Cuba-Rushford engage families through proactive and creative communication strategies that position family members not as recipients of information, but as partners in a collective process to support their children.

Viewing Student Success Holistically

[We] have wonderful teachers that are so focused on the whole child . . . So what can they do to address their social-emotional needs, as well as [what they] can do to prepare students academically.
– principal

Student success at Cuba-Rushford Elementary is viewed holistically, with numerous staff viewing happiness, safety, and well-being as goals that are inseparable from academic outcomes. Alongside the push for academic rigor, the utilization of social-emotional learning (SEL), emphasis on character traits, and the use of restorative justice strategies all contribute to the development and support of children. As many educators attested, the recent adoption of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) has helped support students holistically, as it provides a clear and systematic way to monitor both academic progress and social-emotional well-being. The MTSS framework allows also educators to develop data-driven interventions and targeted supports for students who may be struggling.

¹ Note: A z score is a way of showing how far a value is from the average compared to other values. In simple terms, it tells you whether something is above or below typical performance, and by how much. A z score of 0 represents the average, where a z score of 1 means the value is one standard deviation above typical performance.

Building a Positive School Environment

[Students] feel safe and they feel cared about. I think when they are feeling safe and cared about, they want to come to school. And when they're happy, emotionally, you can just tell that they can't wait to see you. – teacher

Citing the district motto, “Every Student Every Day,” educators described their concerted efforts to build strong relationships with each and every student. These relationships contribute to an overall positive school environment that is strengthened by a range of programming and activities designed to engage students. A new playground and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) room as well as clubs, extracurriculars, and activities that often extend into the weekend and summer were mentioned by educators as some of the many ways to promote student engagement and attendance.

A Closer Look

The three highlighted practices discussed above are evident throughout the four lines of inquiry that frame the study of which this case is one part. The sections below expand on each of these findings within the context of the study’s framework.

Culture, Climate and Community

The biggest key all the way around is relationship, relationship, relationship. – teacher

Supporting the “Whole Child” by Building Strong Relationships

At Cuba-Rushford, relationships are at the root of the district and school culture. Situated in a close-knit, rural setting where – as a teacher put it – “everybody tends to know everyone, and looks out for everyone,” CRE serves as a hub for students, their families, and the community. Educators capitalize on these strong ties between the school and community in their efforts to strengthen relationships with students. As a teacher noted, “I would say one thing about this school district is just the relationships [with students] . . . the relationships are something that stands out to me.”

Strong relationships serve as a foundation for another main goal of educators at CRE: to support children holistically, rather than simply focusing on their academic progress. The principal, for instance, described the main goal of educators at CRE as “providing kids with the foundations in order to succeed, even after school . . . What can we do to support the whole child and their family?”

Other educators reiterated this approach noting, as one support staff member put it, “[We] educate the whole student . . . It’s not that we’re just worried about test scores.” A district leader, in reflecting on how MTSS has helped support students’ academically and emotionally, similarly felt that “success” was best defined as “giving kids what they need to help them build into successful young adults, both academically and in the SEL realm . . . it’s just the building of the whole child, you know, whatever they need.”

Prioritizing Attendance through Early Intervention

Attendance at Cuba-Rushford is treated as an expression of care and a substantial priority for administrators and staff. For that reason, reducing absenteeism is treated as an intentional, data-driven process anchored in a tiered system. Recurring absences, for instance, trigger immediate responses from educators ranging from an automatic phone call home, letters, and finally home visits conducted by the School Resource Officer.

Yet, instead of a punitive approach, educators at Cuba-Rushford treat the issue of absenteeism with care and empathy and seek to figure out underlying causes of absences before taking additional steps. For example, the school counselor has worked with groups of students who might be having trouble preparing for school or making it through an entire school day. Teachers adopted the same approach in their classrooms. As one teacher put it, “I try to create a classroom community, and I want them to want to come into my classroom.” A support staff member similarly noted how students can be encouraged to come to school with simple acknowledgements such as “It’s so good to see you today. Oh, I’m glad to see your smile.” The superintendent also emphasized the importance of making students feel missed when they are not at school and noted that they regularly go and pick up students who may have missed the bus in the morning. “We go get them, and by doing that, we’re telling parents we care. We’re telling the kid, ‘We can’t live without you.’ And that, to me, is important.”

Getting on the “Same Page” through Consistent and Constant Communication

At Cuba-Rushford, a culture of collaboration is driven by consistent and constant communication with colleagues. Many educators explained how important decisions are made collectively through committees and believed regular communication helps drive improvement in the school. A support staff member noted how it was “great . . . being able to just talk about it and maybe brainstorm issues, bring people together and consider other ideas.” “We don’t do a lot in isolation,” noted another support staff member.

Educators are afforded weekly time in their schedules to meet with one another. For instance, grade-level “congruence” meetings provide valuable opportunities for teachers to work together, while members of the MTSS team meet to discuss the progress of individual students. “I feel like everybody’s on the same page, so to speak, like with what we’re doing in terms of our goals,” explained a support staff member.

School and district leaders at Cuba-Rushford help foster communication and collaboration through a distributed leadership style that invites input from colleagues and staff. “They’re open to change,” explained one teacher, speaking about school and district leaders. The principal explained the importance of collaboration in making changes such as a recent shift in the ELA curriculum and an ongoing transition to standards-based grading. “I feel like [staff] are willing to accept challenges if . . . you’re giving them a voice. So that’s been my whole goal: how can I get you on the same page as me, and what can I do to make you feel like you’re being heard?” Likewise, the superintendent explained the need to be available for staff to “listen and learn from [their] concerns.” He continued, “And to me, that alleviates a lot of problems; that creates opportunities to converse.”

Creating a Culture of Inclusion

Educators at Cuba-Rushford take the motto of “Every Child, Every Day” seriously, believing that each and every student should be seen, valued, and counted regardless of their needs. For example, eight years ago, students with specialized needs who had previously been in programs at the regional BOCES were brought back to the district, and an entire wing to support students with autism was created. The superintendent explained the benefits for students and families to be brought back into the district community so that they could take a greater part in activities and programs:

I just had this vision, as a parent, I see kids being dropped off here on the bus, and they have another 30-minute ride to another program. They’re getting very little programming, and those parents can’t be part of the community. Those kids can’t join in Drama Club, because they’re not here . . . they feel sort of detached. And so, we brought all those kids in.

The district includes students with special needs in other meaningful ways. For example, educators described how students with special needs are included in schoolwide activities and clubs, and that special events, such as a “Sports Spectacular” held at Houghton University, provide additional enrichment. “We want to provide a very inclusive environment . . . so [we’re] making sure they’re aware of those events [and are] providing those supports to those parents, to those teachers, so that their students are able to participate and can be involved,” explained a district leader. A teacher likewise commented, in regards to their students with special needs: “I think Cuba-Rushford does a good job of trying to say, ‘You’re ours. You’re our student.’”

Academic Learning and Programming

How can we do it better? How can we do it different to meet our kids’ needs?
– support staff

Adopting New Curricula Carefully and Collaboratively

Over the last two years, the principal spearheaded an initiative to align English Language Arts (ELA) across the school. In line with the collaborative culture of the school, this decision was made through a meticulous process involving input from teachers. “We treat teachers like professionals,” explained a district leader who described the importance of having teacher input on important decisions such as curriculum. “There’s always a committee for choosing things, making sure that teachers are part of that process,” said one teacher. Another teacher similarly noted how the process involved teacher input rather than a top-down initiative: “It’s not like . . . the district came down and said, ‘This is your new ELA curriculum.’”

Members of the committee not only reviewed different curricula but visited other schools that had implemented the programs being considered before making a decision. The visits helped teachers learn about the various benefits and drawbacks of different curricula; ultimately the committee decided on “Wonders,” which educators felt provided them with more cross-disciplinary options and could be integrated more easily into the MTSS framework being used at CRE. As one teacher elaborated:

There's a lot of social studies and science built into the Wonders curriculum. We also like that [Wonders] has really great tiered instruction for MTSS . . . [and] that could be easily integrated with teaching assistants and other support folks to make sure that all kids could get the instruction that they need.

In addition, the shift to Wonders also provided leaders with an opportunity to align their ELA teaching to state standards, including the literacy briefs recently released by the New York State Education Department as part of its Science of Reading initiative. "I think having a program that aligns with the Science of Reading . . . is exactly what our school needs," said a support staff member.

Providing Targeted Supports Informed by Data

Cuba-Rushford Elementary School utilizes a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensure that interventions are timely, driven by data, and responsive to students' changing needs. "Our decisions are really data-driven, and I think that's made a huge difference," noted a member of the support staff when describing MTSS. The use of a universal set of benchmarks combined with state test scores and classroom data provide a "baseline" – as one support staff member put it – to guide decisions about which intervention to use and to monitor the effectiveness of the changes made. While the MTSS framework helps educators choose supports for struggling students, these decisions – like most at Cuba-Rushford – are made collaboratively. As a district leader put it, "Our teachers meet regularly, and they talk data, they talk kids, they talk where they're at."

MTSS is also viewed by educators as a flexible framework that can and should be adapted to meet the needs of students. For instance, a support staff member described how MTSS meetings allowed her and other colleagues to notice a persistent weakness with phonics among students. Eventually, educators decided to supplement their curricula with a program from the University of Florida Literacy Initiative (UFLI) to support students before interventions were needed. Finally, educators commented on the effectiveness of MTSS to take into account the numerous factors impacting student outcomes. A support staff member explained, for instance, how the framework allows educators to view student performance holistically and ultimately ensures that interventions are more targeted and effective:

[We're] kind of covering all of our bases now . . . because sometimes, you know, issues can present themselves as being academic, and it can be academic, but if we don't address another issue that's going on or look at that or make a consideration in that area, we can do intervention forever, and we may not see the progress we want to. So I really think the multi-tiered system throughout the whole building is really effective for our school.

As the adoption of MTSS is still relatively new for the school, leaders have made sure educators feel supported during its implementation through professional development as well as charts and a handbook that outlines the components of the tiered support system.

Utilizing Exciting and Relevant Programming to Engage Students

At Cuba-Rushford, students are engaged through a variety of fun and exciting programs and curricular options that reflect their interests. The superintendent, for example, explained the importance of making “learning applicable” to students. “Learning happens when there’s interest . . . There has to be a connection to something that [students] know,” he said. For this reason, the elementary school has recently added a STEAM Room that provides students with access to a range of activities, including E-Sports, drones, robotics, and Dungeons and Dragons. The room also serves as a space for students to deliver the morning announcements, a program called the “Rebel Express,” scripted and edited by students and made up of different segments (e.g., weather, news, fact of the day, lunch menu).

The programs don’t stop with the school day at CRE; students can also participate in Saturday morning basketball, a Junior Musical (for fourth graders and older), and a summer enrichment program. “When we offer things,” noted a district leader, “we do it with kids in mind.” These activities benefit students as well as families who may be looking for additional opportunities for their children, especially if they work long hours. “That stuff matters to parents,” noted a district leader.

These programs not only engage students in fun and relevant ways but also increase rates of attendance. “We try to get [students] in the building,” explained a district leader who noted how these programs can entice students who otherwise may be reluctant to come to school.

Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health

It’s not just the classroom teachers . . . it’s also the counselors, it’s also behavior specialists, it’s all the people impacting that child’s life. And having a congruence time where you can all get together, look at data, talk about students. — district leader

From Institutional Vision to Classroom Practice: SEL and Well-being as a Collective Effort

At Cuba-Rushford, student well-being and SEL are part of a shared vision across the district — a collective effort of schooling in which every role, from counselor to classroom teacher, contributes to the child’s development and to a school ecosystem of care and learning. As described above, this system is scaffolded by the district’s MTSS framework, which provides a baseline of support to all students, while also identifying students or groups of students who require increased levels of assistance based on their needs. SEL is also embedded into one congruence meeting per month, which, as a teacher explained, gives classroom teachers and counselors “a specified SEL day where . . . [they] talk about just that.” During these meetings, teachers and other support staff meet to identify students, review data, and share ideas on how to meet specific social-emotional needs.

The shared emphasis on character across the building is anchored by a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) matrix, which uses the phrase “be respectful, be safe, be responsible” to promote behavioral expectations and improve overall school climate. These expectations are reinforced through the “Paws system” (tied to the Grey Tiger school mascot) in which, as a teacher explained, “if students make good choices, they’re awarded a paw.” Paws

can be handed out by any member of the school staff to students who are exhibiting behavior in line with the PBIS expectations. The principal reported that “We meet monthly for a character ed assembly . . . and during the assembly we have this massive digital paw wheel where [there are] different awards every month. So this Friday, I’m doing a cupcake party with a third-grade class.”

At the classroom level, the district’s behavior specialist visits each class weekly to engage in small-group SEL lessons, particularly with fifth-grade students transitioning to middle school. Teachers also use the Second Step curriculum to guide morning meetings, where they help students share what’s going on in terms of emotions and feelings. A teacher noted, for example, the importance of learning “about trauma and regulating behavior.”

Reframing Discipline: Restorative Practices and Tiered Behavior Response

Building on the shared culture of care and learning, discipline itself is reframed at Cuba-Rushford as a space for empathy, growth, and repair. The MTSS framework anchors this approach, ensuring staff are “not jumping . . . to making a referral too early,” allowing space to explore different factors behind a child’s behaviors. This process of conceptualizing student behavior as multifaceted and collaborating to find appropriate solutions is translated into everyday practices across the school. As one school leader explained, “I try my best not to suspend students if I don’t have to,” relying instead on the school counselor, behavior specialist, and social worker as a first response. The same leader noted that all staff have been trained in the “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” framework, which grounds discipline in “restorative circles,” replacing punitive responses with structured conversations.

More than replacing punishment, restorative practices create spaces that promote emotional awareness, learning, and student voice. In restorative circles, students are asked “How are you feeling?” and given space to “work through those emotions,” ensuring that “students have a voice at the table,” as one school leader mentioned. These practices are woven into daily routines: For example, one teacher noted that most grade levels open the day with “a morning meeting or a circle . . . how’s everybody feeling today?” serving to cultivate emotional literacy as a schoolwide habit.

Building Mental Health Support through the Community

At Cuba-Rushford, student mental health and social-emotional growth are understood as a joint responsibility with families and the wider community, not something the school does in isolation. Noting, as one district leader did, that “so many things in kids’ lives happen outside of school,” the district has added new positions to help support students and their families. A full-time social worker, for instance, provides counseling for students during the school day, connects families with community resources, and provides monthly parent training and consultation. Additional support is provided by the district’s behavior specialist and a counselor hired through the regional BOCES. “It’s the caring of the children, the community, and supporting the families when they need it,” explained a teacher. A support staff member described the district’s ongoing efforts to “bring in more community partnerships” such as expanding the food pantry, providing more health and dental services, and partnering with additional mental health providers to ensure

all students receive the services they need. We're "trying to explore those avenues out there and see what else we can bring from the community into the school," she explained.

Educator Preparation, Support, and Organizational Capacity

I think we spend a lot of time making sure teams fit right and making sure people like who they work with. And I think that's why we have a great staff. – district leader

Fostering Alignment across School Buildings

In response to a perceived "disconnection" – as a district leader put it – between the elementary school and the middle/high school, leaders in Cuba-Rushford made a concerted effort to strengthen vertical alignment across the district. For instance, while the shift to MTSS has already occurred at the elementary school, it is beginning to be rolled out at the middle/high school to ensure that interventions remain appropriate and effective as students enter different buildings. Similarly, leaders also explained they considered the way new curricula, such as the adoption of Wonders, could be better aligned to the middle/high school to ease the transition of students as they leave the elementary building. The principal, for example, described how these issues are discussed during "transition meetings" that occur across grade levels and with middle school educators:

[We] talk about what that looks like going from grade to grade . . . [O]ne thing we like to think about is what skills need to be aligned. What do the sixth-grade teachers need to know in order to continue that flow of instruction [from fifth grade]?

District leaders also created two strategic roles in their team specifically designed to help foster cohesion between the schools. A district principal position was created in 2024 to help put "everything kind of under one umbrella," as one district leader put it. This person, according to a district leader, works to ensure that "programs, procedures, and rules" across the school buildings are aligned, including by taking part in the hiring of new staff. Second, a professional learning leader position was added to ensure that professional development is delivered across the district more efficiently and that educators receive support as new districtwide practices and programs are adopted and implemented. As a district leader summarized, "[M]aking things more cohesive, having more communication between the buildings really does help."

Additionally, leaders described the expansion of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program to a full day in 2023 to support working families while also ensuring that students entering Kindergarten would be well-prepared. A district leader explained how the program helps incoming Kindergartners "know what the expectations are." He continued, "And more than just academically, like 'Hey, when you get to class, this is how she has you line up' ...so it's like we're getting them ready for that transition now."

Supporting Learning and Student Well-Being with Teaching Assistants

One factor identified by educators at Cuba-Rushford Elementary as contributing to their students' strong academic performance is the support of teaching assistants (TAs) throughout the building. Although leaders acknowledged that recent budgetary constraints have posed staffing

challenges, the principal reported that the school now has a balanced distribution of three TAs for math and three for reading. The additional TAs – which some participants noted was even a source of envy for educators visiting from other schools – help provide more “one-on-one” time with students, as one support staff member put it.

The caring culture of Cuba-Rushford extends to TAs, who also support students’ social-emotional well-being and mental health. Because TAs push in to different classrooms throughout the day, educators explained, they have a “unique” opportunity to build relationships with students in different contexts. A support staff noted how TAs provide additional support for children at the school explaining, “I think we’re not getting the falling through the cracks as much because of the way we’re set up.

Making Extra Efforts to Attract and Support New Teachers

In response to the reduced number of applicants for new positions that many districts are facing, leaders at Cuba-Rushford described additional efforts to find qualified candidates and keep those who do come to the district.

First, leaders expanded their search for candidates by attending job fairs and through social media outlets to promote new positions. The district also leverages its connections with local colleges by providing opportunities for student teaching and encouraging those who seem like a good fit to apply for open positions. As a district leader put it, “We always say we want to hire the best wherever they find us.” While noting that staff who grew up in the area have a special connection to the school, the principal similarly noted that “it’s also nice to have people that bring in a different perspective or have a different background.”

Complementing these strategies, leaders also emphasized the need to retain those who do come to Cuba-Rushford. A district leader, for instance, explained how their hiring team “flipped” the notion that “people won’t want to move here, and if they do, they’ll want to leave” to “let’s give them a reason to stay here.” To this end, the district provides many incentives for new hires such as capping the elementary classes at 18 students. The superintendent also emphasized the focus on positive school “culture” and the need to be “flexible” with teachers and staff members. As he explained, “I know other schools are very rigid, [but] I say there’s a little bit of a give and take, like family . . . Our employees have lives outside of school, and we want to support them.”

New employees are welcomed to the district with several days of orientation and paired with a mentor. In addition, the district’s professional learning leader meets with new hires monthly and provides additional in-house professional learning, instructional coaching, and support for teachers (new or otherwise) who may be encountering struggles. Finally, educators reported that consistency and collaboration from leaders provide another reason to stay at the school. The superintendent, for instance, has led the district for over a decade – a “luxury” that many districts do not have, said one district leader. A support staff member noted that the district utilizes “collaborative decision making that really is an essential part of a productive, positive environment for learning and teaching.”

Family Engagement and Community Relationships

Our teachers here really have their hearts out for children and even their families. I think we do a lot to support families in this district and this community. – teacher

Utilizing Resourceful and Responsive Family-School Communication Strategies

Educators at Cuba-Rushford consistently utilize creative pathways to build relationships with families. Thoughtful consideration of family needs is foundational to these outreach strategies and is supported by clear, accessible, and practical messaging. One district leader’s reflection on the thought process behind their recently revamped community newsletter captures their intuitive engagement efforts:

I think we’re trying to really take the approach of like, what do parents need and want to know? They want to know when state testing is. They want to know when the concerts are. I think too many times we’re like, “Oh, yeah, we’ll put that on a flyer.” But . . . you can plan everything based right on this [newsletter], and then we stay true to this. So, I think that’s helped just in the communication.

Proactive communication is also evident in leaders’ expectations of staff to consistently and positively check in with parents and caregivers. While the application ParentSquare is a go-to communication tool, flyers containing important information are regularly sent home to families. Child Study Team (CST) meetings bring parents and caregivers to the table, further supporting this proactive approach – opening lines of communication on intervention processes, bridging resources with the home, and ensuring families receive clear guidance about decisions and points of contact.

Staff communication practices extend beyond traditional methods, as creative avenues are used to engage and inform community members. For example, the student-led morning program mentioned above – “The Rebel Express Show” – enables children to share information with the community while learning new skills. Innovative communication is likewise seen in support staff members’ creation of a new podcast through which important resources and provider information is shared with families for families.

Investing Collectively in Student Success

Deep-rooted connections sustain a community of care in Cuba-Rushford, where educators celebrate the neighborly spirit that defines their rural surroundings. These informal and formal bonds foster commitment from local leaders and businesses, who actively support children’s diverse needs – whether through fall pumpkin donations from car repair shops, organizing field trips with businesses that have family connections to the school, or partnerships with local churches to provide school supplies.

This Cuba-Rushford community embodies generosity, as families and educators work together in organic ways to ensure everyone’s needs are met – especially during the holidays. A district leader even reported that some parents ask, “Which family needs Christmas presents this year?”

In this sense, the ethic of shared responsibility and compassion weaves throughout Cuba-Rushford, building partnerships that have evolved into authentic, trusting, and empowering collaborations.

Building a Culture of Trust, Inclusion, and Shared Responsibility

Through intentional collaboration and accessible programming, Cuba-Rushford educators work to ensure children and their families feel valued and connected. This is reflected in the school's grant-funded initiative to rebuild their primary playground into a safer and user-friendly space that can be enjoyed by all students. Considering their process, the principal highlighted their deliberate decisions to incorporate community feedback – especially centering children's and family members' voices:

It allowed parents and the students [in] the community to be able to come in and have a say in the design. They let the kids kind of decide what it is they wanted to have out there. And parents could, too, and [that] was important.

The commitment to inclusion and community voice also extends to meaningful practices that uplift the diverse experiences, strengths, and needs of children and their families. A district leader elaborated on how this perspective is grounded in empathy and understanding:

I think that as educators, it's important to tap into that human element and really have empathy for the understanding of what these parents are going through, whether it's from a perspective, again, of . . . parents [who] have a child who's profoundly autistic and all that encompasses or [a child who] might struggle academically, but they excel in different capabilities outside of the classroom, or our students who are in an integrated coteaching model where they're just not reading as fast as their peers. So, I think that taking into account where the parent is coming from and approaching that with a level of grace and understanding really builds that trust, and I think relating it back again to a human level.

In a Nutshell

Educators at Cuba-Rushford Elementary School foster a culture of communication, inclusion, and care. Through data-driven interventions, engaging academic and extracurricular programming, and collaborative decision making, CRE educators promote both students' academic success and well-being while striving to build partnerships with families. These practices contribute to a positive and inclusive school environment where students are engaged, supported, and positioned to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Cuba-Rushford Elementary School
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