



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from
DJJ Director Andy Block

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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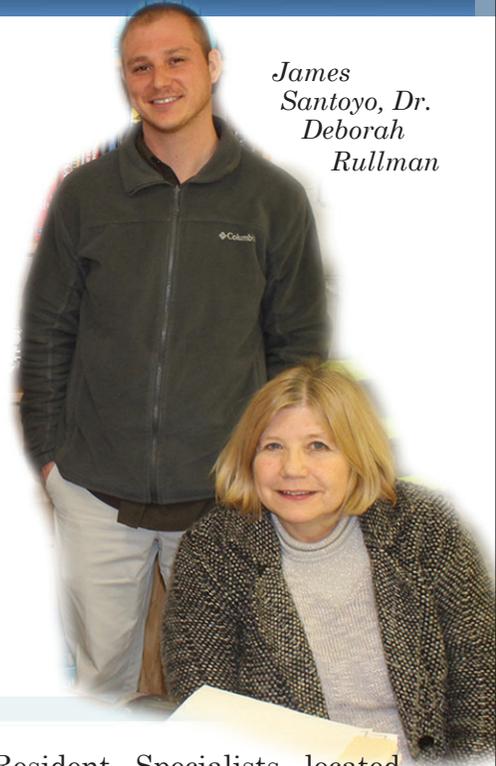
'This Is Like A New School'

Teachers noticing major improvements, survey reveals

One of the guiding principles of our transformation effort is SAFETY – ensuring the well being of our youth as well as the staff who work with them. Our Education Unit, in close partnership with the Bon Air residential staff, have taken significant strides in recent months toward improving safety, including establishing a Reflection Room, adding Resident Specialists to each classroom, teaching by residential units, and creating collaborative teacher teams for each content classroom in support

of the personalized learning model. Most recently, the Education Unit implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program in Yvonne B. Miller High School classrooms.

Dr. Lisa Floyd, Deputy Director for Education, recently surveyed teachers to get their impression of the impact of these changes. The following is a sampling of the overwhelmingly positive experience they report is taking place. Congratulations to all for your excellent work. – *Andy*



James Santoyo, Dr. Deborah Rullman

Because of two primary changes, my level of safety during school hours has increased. First, having a Resident Specialist

present during classes discourages negative student behaviors before they begin. Having the RS present is an unspoken reiteration of the behavior expectations of the room. Second, units staying together in core classes provides students with a measure of comfort and personal security, as they know all others in the room and already know what to expect from those peers.

Teachers at Yvonne B. Miller are committed to providing students with academic support based on the individual needs of the students. It is evident when visiting classrooms that teachers take the time to build rapport with students in order to identify each student's unique needs to support academic achievement.

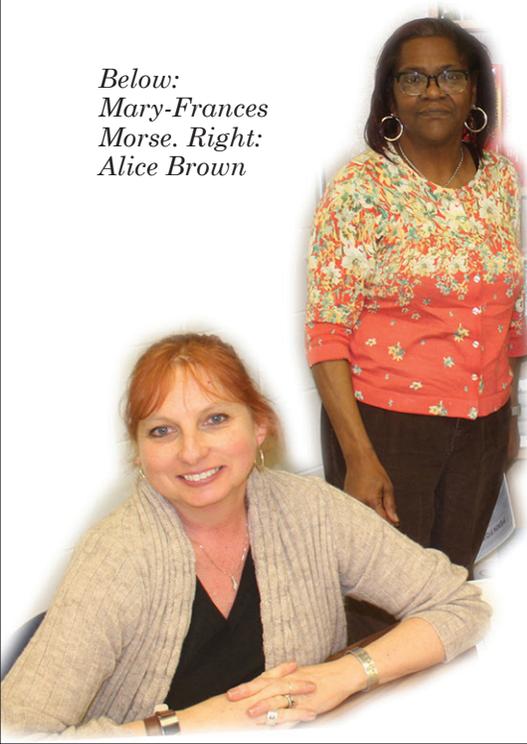
Resident Specialists located outside of the classroom has been a tremendous source of security.

There is outstanding student population movement during school and doors are secured during each class period.

The design of the Community Model insures that students take responsibility in a mature fashion. The culmination of staff dedication with consistent implementation creates a community atmosphere, ultimately allowing for safety to be secured throughout the facility.

The majority of staff on main campus in classrooms are very supportive and help encourage students to complete their work.

*Below:
Mary-Frances Morse. Right:
Alice Brown*





Crystal Bolling, left, and Faye Walker

Almost all of my students have evolved into self directed learners that have them fitting into the profile of the 21st century student.



Students and staff share a mutual respect for each other. Because of this mutual respect, students, mostly, are able to trust their educational staff and make academic progress.



When given a sense of control over their academics, unencumbered by arbitrary deadlines, students are becoming more and more motivated to complete their courses in their own time. The boosting of those students who refuse work impacts those hard workers less. I'm hearing kids tell others to leave them alone or be quiet because they're working "to get up outta here."



I am able to see and teach each student as a unique person, versus a cluster of data points. This allows me to address the learning needs of each student in a precise way, versus treating a group of students and hope they all have the same learning needs. This is THE most effective way of teaching THE most challenged students that the Commonwealth of Virginia has.



It is positive to observe so many of our youth asking to speak to behavior specialists, counselors, community coordinators, educators, security staff, unit staff and security when they need support with their emotions and social situations.

There has been a marked decline of in-school fights as well as hallway fights. As the semester progressed, the number of different students going to reflection or back to the unit declined in a statistically significant manner.



Teachers are collaborating with one another to better support the students.



Students are excited about the PBIS. Behaviors tend to be easier to handle with unit teaching, especially when strong resident specialist is in the room to support the teacher.



Staff and teachers are more positive. The environment this semester is lighter, but everybody is still working very hard.



Left: Deonta Gail. Right: Mona Lisa Fontaine, Shirley Garnett





From left: Jonathan Davis, Richard Pittman, Meghan Hamm, Vanessa Broadnax, Sarah Crosscut, Kevin Pierce

Students will comply when being told they are doing a good job, you will see the benefits of them returning back to class with that same assurance. Students will work with teachers to get others to comply to behave appropriately.



Last year, I might have taken repeated verbal abuse from a child if he were nonviolent and seated because the process was clunky, the Reflection Room was full, or he was a “frequent flyer” there. Now I don’t have to weigh the pros and cons of sending him after running the “Give ‘Em 5” steps and determining it would

be an appropriate sanction. The behavioral support staff is awesome, firm, and consistent with both staff and students. Behavior in my room is much more to my liking, and I’m finding I can have discussions with kids about why I have this or that rule, improving their listening, empathy, and social skills.



Students rarely curse each other. The incidence of students cursing out any adult in the room has dropped to essentially zero.



I admire how the administration communicates daily with teachers and staff in our morning

briefings as well as upper level administration allowing teachers to be a part of their meetings. This gives upper level administration the opportunity to hear from the building level staff on the front lines, as well as give the opportunity for teachers to share what’s on their minds.



If you treat people like animals they will act like animals. Bon Air has adopted a system attempting to create a community environment. Even on our most trying day there always remains an element of community throughout the facility. This new regime is allowing students to feel less trapped and more empowered. A key result is students’ behavior has become significantly less hostile and more oriented toward uplifting each other.

Clockwise from left: Katina Poole-Berry, Suzanne Lloyd, Jamia Mason, Kathy Reed

This is like a new school. Where there used to be students cursing at the adults, refusing to sit let alone go to class and do their assignments, there are now essentially fight-free hallways and classrooms. The majority of students that have to visit the Reflection Room modify their behavior to the point of eventually not visiting that room again. Students present as feeling safe enough to focus on their learning...they used to have to focus on not getting hit. We are now a learning institution that is enjoyable to teach in.

