



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

Local SYR: Top state lawmaker praises ESM, hopes to use mental health programs as a state model

ANDREW DONOVAN January 4, 2024

MINOA, N.Y. (WSYR-TV) — The chairwoman of the State Senate Education Committee visited Pine Grove Middle School on Thursday, Jan. 4, to learn first-hand about the East Syracuse Minoa School District's innovation in mental health programs for students.

Superintendent Dr. Donna DeSiato opened her remarks remembering when the pandemic forced students home for months.

ESM Stem Education

She said, "On Monday, the county executive announced around 10:00 a.m. that at 4:00 p.m. that day, on March 16, we'd be going remote for an undetermined amount of time."

Nearly four years later, the school has never been the same.

"We see a lot more anxiety, a lot more depression and inability to community beyond social media," said Cheryl West, who leads ESM's counseling services.

One counter strategy implemented at the high school this year is called SALT. It stands for Spartan Achievement Learning Time. 20-minute blocks are added to high schoolers' schedules. Students are divided into classrooms with teachers, a group that will stay together for all four years, for conversations that focus on one another's social, emotional and mental well-being.

SALT is just one of many programs ESM had the chance to brag about in a presentation to State Senator Shelley Mayer, the Chair of the State Senate Education Committee.

Senator Mayer said, “(This is) a very proactive approach to giving kids what they need to succeed. We haven’t seen it to this degree anywhere else that I’ve been. It’s a model to be replicated.”

Chairwoman Mayer’s goal is to give more attention to good examples and share the ideas with schools statewide, including creative ways to fund the programs.

“What stands out most is the extensive county involvement in the school itself and district itself. That is something we need to replicate and have statewide,” Mayer told NewsChannel 9.

Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon was part of the presentation and was able to discuss the programs and partnerships Onondaga County shares with the district.

For more information about what ESM officers are, the district has a portion of its [website dedicated to mental health](#).

Read the article here: <https://www.localsyr.com/news/local-news/top-state-lawmaker-praises-esm-hopes-to-use-mental-health-programs-as-state-model/>