



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

## LIHerald.com: Social-emotional learning is key in schools

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Second grade teacher Lindsay Struss demonstrates an optimistic closure to end the school day.

Students, staff and administrators from the Merrick School District met with State Senator and Education Committee Chair Shelley B. Mayer, as well as Sen. John Liu, the chairman of New York City Education Committee and Sen. Steve Rhoads on Dec. 1.

Guests observed four lessons and activities relating mental health and social-emotional learning.

From whole class instruction that explicitly teaches social-emotional skills to small groups run by school social workers that allows students to practice those skills before generalizing them, Merrick has created its own blended program that fits various pupil needs while creating an inclusive environment that encourages a sense of belonging in every classroom.

“Every employee in this school district has an impact on how we function,” noted Dominick Palma, superintendent of schools.

Visitors sat in on a morning meeting — the way each class in the district from pre-K through sixth starts their day, as well as an optimistic closure — the way classrooms close the day.

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“It’s a way that our students and teachers are able to reflect on their school day and set up learning for the next day,” Salvatore Dossena, the assistant superintendent for student services and technology said. “No matter what happens during the school day, we find a way to reflect on our learning and social interactions, so we can set goals for the following day.”

Second grade teacher Lindsay Struss said this has been a new addition to her classroom routine over the last few years.

“It has proven to be quite effective,” she added.

During a push in with district school counselor, Karen Alaimo, students worked on the executive functioning ability, flexible thinking. Given a paper bag containing everyday items, students were tasked to think of other uses for each item.

“You are able to look at something one way,” Alaimo said. “But you could also look at it in another way. These are some of the tools we need to be successful during the day.”

Over the last few years, Merrick pulled together a team of 40 school community members to develop the best practices to support students and their families.

“You have small enough classes that you can really feel the difference,” Mayer said at the end of the visit “You are doing fascinating work and I’m sure it will show longitudinally.”

“The foundation you’re laying here,” Rhoads said, “can really relate to the middle and high school level.”

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