



Picture: Bowler students participating in food preparation demonstrations. Submitted by Bowler School District

BOWLER SCHOOL DISTRICT IS COMMITTED TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

In the Bowler community, neighbors know each other and are quick to help each other in a pinch. The residents are familiar with the challenges of lack of access to transportation, sparse housing, and minimal access to fresh produce and healthcare options. This is true, especially for those living near the Stockbridge-Munsee Indian reservation. Many residents still need access to a vehicle, and ride sharing (i.e., Uber or Lift) is yet to be available in this area, which makes it hard to get around. Regarding fresh produce, residents rely on convenience stores inside gas stations for grocery needs.

When Glenda Butterfield-Boldig began as Superintendent in 2020, she envisioned creating equitable spaces and opportunities. Staff initially needed clarification about this commitment to equity because they thought it would be a seasonal change that would come and go in their district. But Glenda's commitment to creating equity for all children with real opportunities for every child to succeed was not just a flavor of the day or the moment. This cultural shift has taken time and dedication from everyone. Fortunately, Glenda found a strong ally in Natalie Minshell, Social Emotional Learning Coordinator, who came alongside Glenda to lead this effort.

Glenda and Natalie have collaborated and taken time to build understanding across the district about what equity practices actually look like. It has taken time and bravery to create a safe space where all the members of their school community can speak openly about what they need and how to make changes. Some other key leaders are the elementary principal, Brandi Dove, and middle and high school principal, Trina Borneman.

Bowler School District is a rural district located in North Central Northeast Wisconsin.

- **They are comprised of two schools and 329 students.**
- **The demographic makeup of their elementary school is 48% Native American Students, 51% White students and 1% other ethnic backgrounds.**
- **Of these students 62% are economically disadvantaged.**
- **In this rural area, the nearest stores including grocery stores are 20 miles away.**

Building Relationships and Understanding your Community

Natalie has been with the district for 5 years; she grew up in a small town of Tilleda, near Bowler, and attended Bowler School from 4th grade through graduation. Prior to joining the Bowler School District, Natalie spent 6 years as a school counselor with the Menominee Indian School District at Keshena Primary School. She also served the Stockbridge Munsee Community as the Tribal Social Worker and later the Indian Child Welfare Manager. In addition, Natalie spent time as a county social worker in both Menominee and Shawano Counties, serving the local community. She has formed deep relationships with youth, teachers, county and tribal partners, and those at every level within the school community. Trusting relationships have helped people embrace the changes because community members feel comfortable talking with her and asking tough questions.

Natalie has a natural way of building trust with community members by being open and honest. Transparency has led to a shift in their culture where members feel included and have a sense of belonging. School community members have stated they feel safe and included and that what they say matters, which Natalie notes, has been critical in creating equity for all.

Funding

Bowler School District (BSD) utilized funding from a Centering Equity grant to hire a consultant from Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 6's *Center 4 All* who connected with staff from every level to share their experiences and feedback in making changes. The district members used self-reflection to evaluate themselves and determine their needed changes.

Trust

Building trust with your community is crucial to success. When the equity work began, there were divisions amongst the community about what this would mean and what would happen. Community members needed time to understand the concept of centering equity before embracing it. In the beginning, there were divisions about what this would mean and what would happen. With the support of CESA 6, the community was able to have difficult conversations, build on each other's strengths, and create a culture where each person is valued.

Reference:

1. World Food Program. (2023, September, 21). The effects of child nutrition on academic performance: How schools can break the cycle of poverty. Retrieved from <https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/effects-child-nutrition-academic-performance-how-school-meals-can-break-cycle-poverty/#:~:text=Nutritious%20school%20meals%20can%20transform,term%20health%20and%20well%2Dbeing>.



Picture: Community members prepare backpacks for weekend backpack program at Bowler School District.

"Individuals now feel appreciated, which is a positive change that has grown out of this process. School team members feel they can speak openly, which leads to more voices being heard. "

Glenda Butterfield-Boldig,
Bowler School District
Superintendent

Feeding Students

Bowler School District secured supporters and funders, including Share Our Strength, and started a backpack program to help decrease food insecurity among their students. This program increased participation in the backpack program from just 17 initial participants to more than 140 students served weekly by the end of the 22-23 school year.

Having enough food can make a big difference in students' lives. Students who eat school meals regularly can concentrate and learn better.¹ BSD has incorporated culturally appropriate foods that the students enjoy and offers monthly cooking demonstrations where students as young as second grade can learn how to make simple meals for themselves or their siblings independently. Bowler continues to seek feedback from the community via student and caregiver surveys to maintain an equity practice and increase food security.





Picture: Tatum Bell, AmeriCorps volunteer.

FIVE INCLUSION COMMITMENTS: NEXT STEPS FOR BOWLER

Outcomes from their efforts have led to their district adopting 5 inclusion commitments. Everyone in their district contributed to these and/or agreed on them:

Bowler School District's Inclusion Commitment Statements

Environmental:

We will provide a safe and inclusive environment where everyone will have the opportunity to express creativity and individuality while respecting different or unique perspectives.

Relationships:

We are committed to building positive relationships based on mutual respect, trust and a sense of belonging.

Curriculum Resources:

We will invest in resources that are culturally inclusive with diverse and engaging materials that are relevant to students' needs and are accessible to all families.

School Culture:

We will cultivate a sense of belonging, where all individuals feel supported, valued, and connected.

Instructional Strategies:

We will provide a variety of opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, enhance meaningful engagement, and provide student centered learning with consideration for all backgrounds and ability levels.

What's next for Bowler School District on its Equity Journey?

The district welcomed a new food service director recently and will soon invite community members to submit their favorite family recipes, which will be converted into regular lunch options. The district has hired an AmeriCorps volunteer, Tatum Bell (pictured above), to help them streamline their Weekend Backpack program and make it more efficient and culturally relevant. Finally, the district is in the planning process of establishing a school-based food pantry to provide weekend food support to the community.

For more stories like these please visit **No Kid Hungry** at: <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/>