

# Building relationships

When Principal Mark Mayer arrived at [Talley Middle School](#) four years ago, he says “we saw that we needed to build a strong, positive school climate.” That was the first year Talley students, staff and families took the [Delaware School Climate Surveys](#).

The surveys were developed by the [Delaware Positive Behavior Support \(DE-PBS\) Project](#), a collaboration between CDS and the [Delaware Department of Education](#), and are administered annually to approximately 150 schools. The data they provide allow educators to act with greater precision in making schools safe and engaging.

Talley administrators and staff began implementing supports tailored to the needs revealed by the survey data. Among the supports was the introduction of advisory periods, where students meet in small groups to tackle social-emotional issues like cyberbullying. “Kids really responded. They all had something to share,” says Talley Dean of Students Melinda Tartaglione.

Further improvements in the school’s climate came with administrators’ and educators’ embrace of the [Multi-Tiered System of Support \(MTSS\)](#) model, an evidence-based strategy matching instruction and interventions to students’ needs based on data. For example, after the MTSS team identified a need to improve how students perceive teacher support, they employed a strategy where teachers identify students with whom they have close relationships. For students whom few teachers identify, Talley is investing in new ways to help them and teachers develop stronger relationships.

Along with the school climate surveys, DE-PBS provides guidance, technical support and statewide workshops for educators implementing MTSS. Instructional Coach [Megan Pell](#) says that “when schools use climate data to inform their MTSS model for behavior, we know we will see more success stories like Talley’s.”

Those stories already are taking shape at some other schools in the [Brandywine School District](#), says Jim Simmons, executive director of secondary education. A “mindset shift” is happening, he says.

“Building trusting and supporting relationships goes along with helping kids academically,” says Mayer. “You can’t have one without the other.”



Talley Middle School Dean of Students Melinda Tartaglione and Principal Mark Mayer are members of the MTSS team that tailors instruction and interventions to meet students’ needs as reflected on the Delaware School Climate Surveys.