

Emphasize equity, not punishment

Concerns over disproportionate discipline meted out to African American students and students with disabilities in schools nationally led CDS and the [Delaware Department of Education \(DDOE\)](#) in 2021 to further encourage more constructive and equitable practices in Delaware public schools.

“We saw a groundswell of advocacy for things we are promoting,” says CDS instructional coach [Megan Pell](#), “including addressing implicit bias and supporting all students equitably.”

Through the DDOE-CDS [Positive Behavior Support](#) project, and its emphasis on creating safe and caring learning environments, school and district educators focus more on establishing trust and less on exercising punitive measures.

At [Claymont Elementary School](#), students are learning to reach out rather than act out when they feel upset. “We knew suspensions weren’t solving the problem,” says Tamara Grimes-Stewart, the school’s principal. “We are building relationships with kids who are struggling emotionally so they know there is someone they can talk to.”

In the [Brandywine School District](#), a multi-tiered system of support now includes social workers, psychologists and two recently hired equity specialists. With an emphasis on building relationships rather than issuing punishment, students can focus on learning, says Marqueia Davis, supervisor of Equity and Culture. “We want school to be a place,” she says, “where students can feel good about themselves and flourish.”



Principal Tamara Grimes-Stewart of Claymont Elementary School, where students are learning to reach out rather than act out.