



http://www.unifiednewsgroup.com/fitchburg_star/schools/sugar-creek-forms-partnership-with-edgewood-college/article_c78ff97a-e6a6-5153-89d8-f35f4cffb8e1.html

FEATURED

Verona Area School District

Sugar Creek forms partnership with Edgewood College

Program has Edgewood student teachers take class at Verona school

Scott Girard Unified Newspaper Group 5 hrs ago

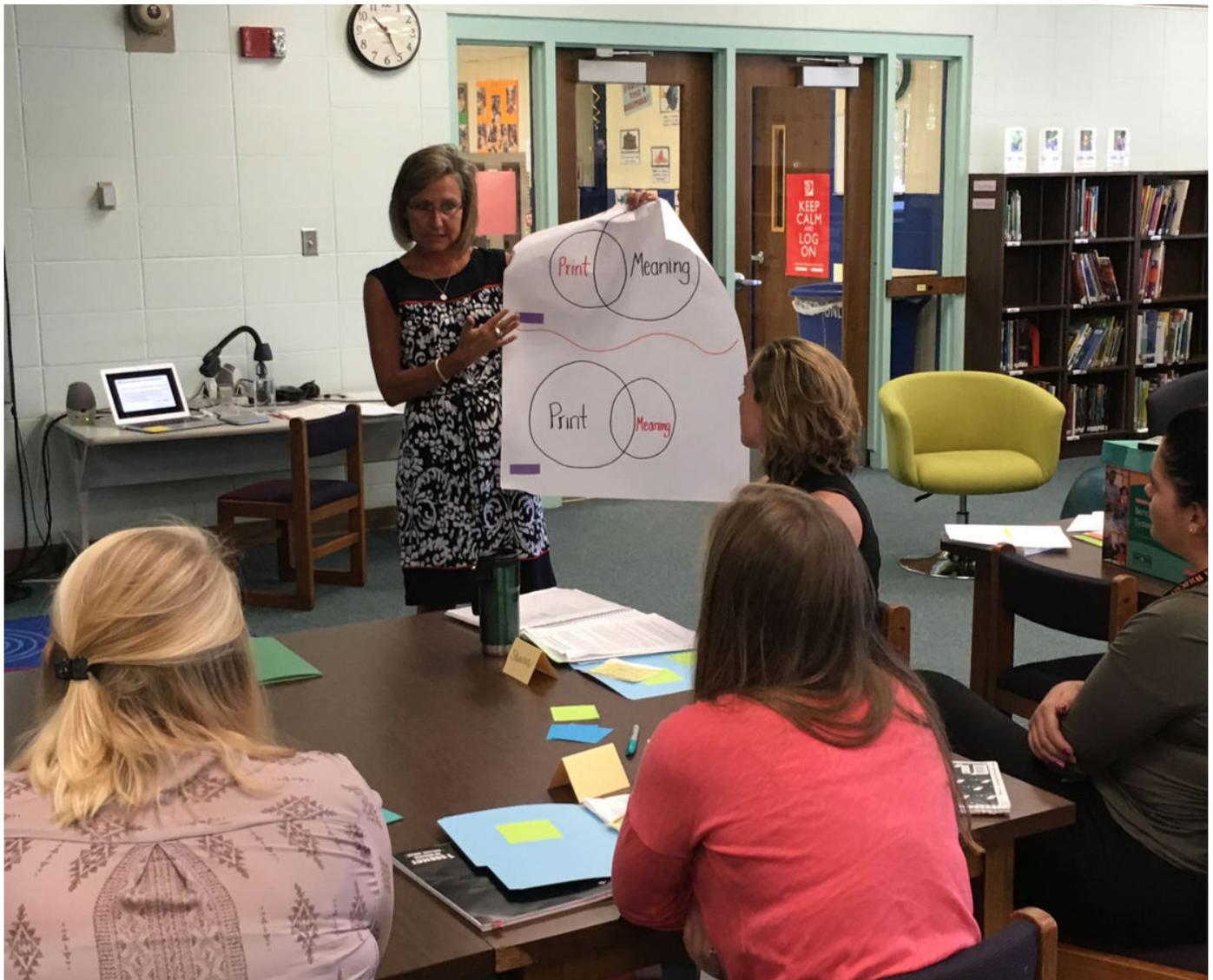


Photo submitted

Sugar Creek Elementary School teaching and learning coordinator Amy Buss talks to Edgewood students and professor Sharon about how to do literacy assessments.

Sugar Creek Elementary School has five more students this fall than any enrollment numbers will show.

Mixed in with the 4- to 10-year-olds are five 20-somethings, all seniors at Edgewood College, who are taking a class housed at the Verona school this fall.

It's the first year of a new pilot partnership between the Madison-based college and Sugar Creek, in which teachers learn from an Edgewood professor and do student teaching work in the same building.

It's one of a pair of partnerships between the Verona Area School District and Edgewood, with the other being the Equity Academy (formerly Grow Your Own) initiative that allows minority Verona Area High School graduates to attend Edgewood's teaching school at a discounted rate that is paid by VASD.

The program has been a couple years in the making. SC principal Todd Brunner said he began talking with Edgewood's dean of education, Timothy Slekar, before working through the logistical challenges associated with the idea.

"(We) talked about ways we could come together as a team to meet similar needs," Brunner said. "I need well-trained teachers, we constantly have openings. I want the best teachers possible in front of our kids, he wants highly trained young teachers to graduate."

Those young teachers are appreciative of the partnership.

"We feel like we're part of the school," said Edgewood senior Payton Klein. "We have a much stronger connection with the kids than we would (otherwise)."

It also allows Edgewood professor Sharon Besser to be a better instructor for her literacy class.

She no longer will "completely lose control over their experience" in a classroom like she did when they spread to different schools for their practicums, she explained.

"My role has sort of shifted," Besser said. "I'm not the expert in the ivory tower giving this is how you have to teach. I'm basically helping my students make sense of the teaching they're seeing, then we add the theory in."

Besser is not the only teacher to benefit either, as a pair of SC teachers that have hosted the practicum students in their classrooms said it's been a big help – even for some simple reasons.

“Working with many children there are so many different needs,” said second-grade teacher Linda Weaver. “Just having more hands is always a benefit in an elementary classroom.”

Immersion

Last Thursday, as Besser walked into Brunner’s office, the principal asked what her students thought about the lockdown drill the school had earlier that morning.

“It raised a lot of questions (from the students),” Bessemer said before launching into a discussion with Brunner about protocols and training.

That’s an example of the experience the students can have together now, making it much easier for Besser to understand the questions her students ask.

“They’re questions that are going to propel their learning in a much quicker way than I would’ve been able to do back at Edgewood,” she said. “In the old model, I didn’t have any relationship with the teachers, it was just kind of an admin thing.”

Whether drills or lessons in a classroom, Besser’s location in the building and relationship with Brunner and the teachers allow her to ask for more information easily, like she did with the drill, as she and Brunner discussed the different philosophies about how to respond to a lockdown situation.

Besser also brought up an earlier discussion about literacy, in which she and her students had a lesson with the school’s literacy coordinator. Because she was in attendance with her students – which would not happen if their practicums were at different locations – she was more prepared for how to discuss the lesson with them afterward.

The SC teachers notice it, as well.

“It’s helpful that their teacher can tell me what they’re talking about in their classroom ... (and) I can work that into my lessons,” Weaver said. “They can take the knowledge from my classroom back into their classroom. It just kind of works back and forth ideally for their learning ... and then just practical experience.”

The students have also had the opportunity to go through some professional development with SC staff, lessons from people like Brunner on teacher evaluation or the social worker on disclosure laws. It also helps them become part of a school community, rather than just getting to know a single classroom like they would in a normal practicum.

“Everyone’s super accepting of us being here,” Klein said. “When you walk down the halls, everyone says hi.”

Off campus

While they’ve since come to appreciate the benefits, the location of the class was not immediately seen as a good thing for some.

“I found it kind of annoying that it was all the way in Verona,” Edgewood student Adama Guede admitted, laughing at how her attitude toward the location had changed since then.

Originally, Besser had 10 students enrolled for the literacy class taking place at SC, but half had to drop out once the location was finalized because it would not leave them enough time to get to a class that immediately followed.

Now, Guede and Klein have found the benefits – and are glad they could stick in the class.

“I think it’s great having (multiple practicums) in one school,” Guede said.

With the connection established, Besser said she can advertise the class with its location, which will help students avoid having to drop it to get to other classes immediately afterwards.

It’s likely the way “teacher education needs to go,” Slekar, the Edgewood dean, said.

Between this new partnership and the Equity Academy agreement, Slekar said the school and district are working together in ways that benefit students in each. As Edgewood’s students get immersed in the community – and members of the community go to Edgewood to pursue higher education – it’s a partnership he hopes can continue to grow.

“We need to be not just in the schools, but we also need to be part of the communities,” Slekar said. “It’ll be a partnership of sharing in which the best of both of those (college and K-12 classrooms) come together. That’s what’s missing right now.”

Contact Scott Girard at ungreporter@wcinet.com and follow him on Twitter @sgirard9.

Scott Girard