

We Raise NJ is working with our partner organizations to spotlight individual educators, students, parents, and leaders who are showing how #NJStrong they are with their resilient and creative support for students during this challenging time. We do not want to downplay the challenges our educators and students are facing but we feel that highlighting the stories and small successes of a few individuals who are making the best of this situation might be both uplifting and useful to other leaders, educators, and families across the state.



SPOTLIGHT:

JENNIFER JOHNSON-FLOYD

*Second Grade Teacher
William P. Tatem Elementary School,
Collingswood South Jersey*

Prioritizing the social and emotional well-being of teachers, families, and students starts with leadership.

Jennifer, now in her tenth year of teaching, is thankful for her supportive and trusting school and district leadership this year. As her school has shuffled between remote and hybrid instruction, she appreciates the frequent communication she receives from the district and the trust and flexibility of her school's leadership team.

"Since last spring, our superintendent has done such an amazing job keeping everyone informed and updated. There was a lot to consume at first, but as we've gotten through this school year, he's managed to keep emails informative and light-hearted, which is a tough balance to strike. Based on the feedback we've gotten from families, I can confidently say that they feel the same way."

When reflecting on the first few weeks and months of school, Jennifer is honest about the struggles of adapting to a new virtual environment, but maintains a smile.

"Tech issues are tech issues; we're all going through it. Everyone is trying to learn as they go, so I do my best to just laugh things off and keep it moving."

As modeled by district leadership, a go-with-the-flow, be kind attitude is something Jennifer stands behind.

“Our school/district motto is to #bekind and to give everyone hope and grace, and that’s the sentiment I want my students to leave with every day. When this whole thing started, it was a little scary, so humor lightened the mood. I like to remind students that we’re all in this together and I try and create a celebration around anything and everything.”

It’s clear that the district has prioritized the social and emotional well-being of students and staff, which Jennifer attributes to the stakeholder committees created to ensure everyone has aligned goals for this school year. Her school has taken it a step further by trying to maintain several annual events and making them accessible in the digital environment.

“Students and families always look forward to our school events because they break up the school year and give students a chance to win some awesome incentives! This year, we put our “Barnes and Noble” night, where teachers typically read aloud and engage with students and families at a nearby bookstore, on our Flipgrid, and created a Bitmoji book room. Another great annual tradition is “NaNoWriMo,” where students can enter into a national novel-writing competition with a chance to win in-school incentives. The fact that students have actively reached out to me personally to see if these events are still happening goes to show their value. They really create a sense of community.”

She wishes to remind educators and families that it takes a village to raise a child. We Raise NJ commends Jennifer, and countless other educators out there, for maintaining such a positive presence in the classroom for students. We appreciate you modeling how to stay #NJstrong!