

FROM SCREENING TO SUPPORTING AND BEYOND!



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
 DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT
 SERVICES**
DR. TINISHA PARKER
 Gwinnett County Public Schools
 Suwanee, GA

In 2021, under the leadership of Gwinnett County Public School’s new Superintendent, Dr. Calvin Watts, the district developed a 5-year strategic plan, the **GCPS Blueprint for the Future**. It emphasized both student academic achievement and the ‘supportive community’ aspects of serving the whole child to build excellence from a foundation of empathy, equity and effectiveness.

While championing the district’s vision, **Dr. Tinisha Parker** recognized it presented some specific challenges. As Executive Director of the Department of Student Services for GCPS, Dr. Parker oversees a department responsible for the well-being and success of all 182,865 students in the nation’s 11th largest district, Gwinnett County Public Schools, located in the Atlanta Metro area.

She noted, **“We are very large and very diverse – and we love that about our district!”**

MOVING FROM SURVEYS TO A SCREENER

Understanding the strengths and needs of students at scale was the first barrier for Dr. Parker to address.

“We knew from our research on ‘whole child’ and multi-tiered systems of support that there were some significant components completely missing. We had spoken the language of ‘whole child support’ in our district for some time, but not necessarily in a multi-tiered service delivery model.”

GCPS’ move to implement a screener is significant as EdTrust indicates only 6% of all districts implement a behavioral health or social emotional screener.

“We needed to move from surveys to a screener that would inform how we provided social, emotional and behavioral student supports moving forward.”

As Georgia’s largest and most diverse district, there are over 100 different languages spoken, 25% of students considered English Learners (EL), and over 80% of students identifying as part of communities of color including Black, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American.



District Enrollment
182,865

Grades Served
PK-12

Students of Color Enrolled
84%

Economically Disadvantaged
47%

TOOLS AND SUPPORTS USED



**Educational Effectiveness
Surveys™ (EES)**



**Student Universal
Wellness Screener**



**The Whole Educator
Series**

Dr. Parker explained, “While diversity is one of our greatest strengths – we also needed to understand that diversity better.”

In the spring of 2022, Dr. Parker and GCPS turned to the experts at The Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) to start co-designing the needed solutions.

SOLUTIONS AS ROBUST AS THE CHALLENGES

“With 142 buildings and 22,000 staff, and incredibly diverse families to serve – we needed a solution as robust as our challenges. There is certainly a ‘district culture’ but we also have 142 school-site cultures. We needed the tools, resources and expertise to build on each site’s strengths while meeting student needs.”

GCPS began by gathering perceptual data through CEE’s [Educational Effectiveness Survey \(EES\)](#) of staff, families, and students (Spring 2022) to analyze the district and each school’s organizational culture. Fall of 2022, the [Student Universal Wellness Screener \(SUWS\)](#), a social, emotional and behavioral health screener, was administered in grades 3-12 to 130,000 students.

Separately, the EES surveys gathered perceptual data across a number of domains reflecting organizational health while the SUWS focused on the perspective of students and their experience as learners in the organization. Together, the EES and SUWS surveys provided each school with advanced reporting visualizations to support tiered data-based decision-making processes, trend analysis, and Tier 1 alignment to best practice. It also allowed the district to differentiate its support to sites based on data.

Dr. Parker shared that the district’s root cause analysis surfaced a widely held staff belief as to who is responsible for providing ‘supportive community’ services to students.

“There was the perception that ‘supportive community’ was role-dependent and tied to expertise of staff such as social workers and counselors outside of the general classroom. This mindset made us more ‘reactive’ than ‘proactive’ when meeting student needs.”

“Our number one goal was to redefine ‘supportive community’ to include everyone – including staff serving students in Tier 1.”

FROM SCREENING TO SUPPORTING

Dr. Parker recognized each site’s implementation of PBIS and SEL hinged on the culture at each site.

“Staff appreciated the insights around students’ experience, ‘belongingness’ and feelings of disconnectedness. This has been one of the challenges with the pandemic and the interruption of pathways and relationships.’

Dr. Parker also recounted the rationale for adding 2 new offices to support effective, tiered PBIS and SEL practices by all staff for each student. “An additional layer of district-wide support was needed. We added an Office of Behavior Supports and Interventions Fall of 2022

The addition of the Office of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was to develop internal capacity to provide instruction to all students and prepare them with skills for success in school and beyond as graduates of GCPS.”

“With these new tools available, Dr. Parker indicated, “our principals not only had accurate data but an entire toolkit to make the data actionable at their site.”

which resulted in hiring 16 Behavior Intervention Specialists and a new Director. The purpose of the department was to support system-wide implementation of proactive social and behavioral strategies while providing targeted job-embedded professional development to support staff and student success. The addition of the Office of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was to develop internal capacity to provide integrated social emotional learning instruction to all students and prepare them with skills for success in school and beyond as graduates of GCPS.”

To support data aligned to district key performance indicators, visualizations from both the EES and SUWS were provided to all 142 sites along with debrief resources provided by [Dr. John Steach](#), CEE CEO. CEE change management consultants David Tudor and Steven Dahl were assigned to support the district and school administrators, the newly created Office of Behavioral Supports and Interventions, and a cohort of school level leadership teams to action plan and implement research-based strategies across all settings. Concurrently, staff were provided access to CEE’s online Whole Educator Series course featuring SEL and whole child expert Dr. Greg Benner.

By design, this braided set of solutions resulted in the district moving from surveys to a powerful screening tool that launched the district’s efforts to scale its ‘supportive community’ implementation.

Lessons Learned

Dr. Parker articulated the key outcomes for GCPS thus far. “One of the most important shifts we were able to accomplish is socializing the same understanding across the district that screener data is imperative but is also just one data point. The screener data was added to a constellation of data points to help staff make data-based decisions around student needs – but it is not designed to prescribe an intervention.”

At the student level, data provided insights into important peer-to-peer perceptions. Dr. Parker explained, “Questions that centered on ‘respect’ between peers indicated to us that we need to clarify for our students what we mean by ‘respect’ at school. We can’t expect respect if we aren’t teaching it.”

At the staff level, CEE’s reports clearly identified where there was strong perceptual agreement, disagreement, and any concentration of neutrality. “We wanted to shift from being ‘data rich’ but ‘insight poor’ and we were able to do that with CEE’s data visualization resources.”

To make data both visible and actionable, CEE developed customized resources and data review protocols to support each school site’s data interpretation and implementation.

To Reach All, Reach Each and Every

“Seeing the big picture was vital, but we also needed to understand the ‘small picture’ - more about the needs of each learner.”

A champion for this approach throughout her career, Dr. Parker shared her professional journey and more on CEE’s [Outliers in Education](#)

OUTLIERS *in Education*

SEASON 2: EPISODE 7

TO REACH ALL, REACH EACH &
EVERY

WITH DR. TINISHA PARKER

from
cee
The Center for Educational Effectiveness

*“It is exciting to
already see signs of
transformation from
where we started.”*

podcast. Additionally, she and a GCPS team working directly with scaling the work presented at the national SXSW Conference in March 2023.

“We certainly don’t have all the answers, but we believe it’s important to share your journey with colleagues and to learn from the success of others.”

This emphasis on continual professional learning echoes one of the major findings in CEE’s comprehensive [Outlier Study](#) released in 2021 on the common conditions for high levels of student achievement across a 5-year period of time in Washington State. Conducted with generous funding by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the study analyzed 7 measures of performance across 2,100 schools and revealed the common characteristics of 38 schools that removed barriers and ‘beat the odds’ to create the conditions for illuminating and building on students’ strength.

Building with a Blueprint

Dr. Parker shared that while GCPS is already a highly efficient and effective organization, it partners with external providers selectively to improve.

“Partnering with CEE for these specific solutions was very intentional. If I had to say CEE has a ‘secret sauce’ it would be that it had the expertise and tools we needed to scale our work. We knew CEE had done the research into what causes systemic excellence and equity. We have a lot of work ahead to implement the GCPS Blueprint for the Future, but it is exciting to already see signs of transformation from where we started.”

Let’s Connect!

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