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## Lockley early intervention to help children transition

By Debbie Wachter  
New Castle News 6 hrs ago



Joe Anderson

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A lot of students who attend the Joseph W. Lockley Early Learning Center don't look forward to holiday breaks, because they often don't get breakfast or lunch at home.

That's troubling to them, Joe Anderson said.

Anderson, the school's elementary principal, at a meet-and-greet breakfast Wednesday introduced the school's new early intervention team, comprised of Anderson, newly hired school social worker Brian Rice and school counselor Lisa Lontos.

Anderson called together about 60 members of the community — counselors, social service agencies, court personnel and other experts — to address the need for personal intervention and partnering to educate the district's economically, emotionally or socially disadvantaged students.

He explained how conditions in the home lives of many students in the New Castle Area School District can impede the learning process of children at a young age.

"We work with every aspect trying to get them to grow," he said.

New Castle's school system provides free breakfast and lunch for every student, and a fresh fruit or vegetable as a snack every day. The district also has identified 100 students who are eligible for the "bread basket" or "backpack program," who on Fridays are given enough food to take home that they can eat through the weekends, he said. The district also tries to provide clothing for disadvantaged students, provide needed transportation and meet their health needs with immunizations and hygiene.

Anderson noted that the elementary school has 836 students. Of those, 130 (15 percent) have special education needs, and 702



Brian Rice



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(64 percent) are from families that are economically disadvantaged.

### DISADVANTAGE

Using the fictitious name of Samantha, Rice gave an example of a child in school who lives in a three-bedroom home with 10 people, adults and children.

"When she's not living in that home, she's jumping from relative's home to relative's home," he said. "She often comes in with lice, bedbug infestation and many things like that. This is Samantha coming through the door to class, and this is just a small glimpse of one of our students and what they have to deal with. I hope that shows you the importance of you being here and the resources you have so that you can help Samantha," Rice said.

Cara Florie, an impassioned reading facilitator at the school for grades 1 and 2 for about 600 children, said that once students leave kindergarten and go to first grade, "the pressure is on to get these kids reading at grade level by the time they leave this building. With all of the social and emotional issues that we've found, it becomes a struggle for a lot of these kids."

Florie said she has seen that the groups of students who the early intervention program funnel down to are those who really struggle.

"When I look at those students, I see them where each one of them has a story," she said. She coaches teachers, interacts with the children and has learned those stories and sees them as major roadblocks in getting them to the reading levels they need to reach by second grade.

Every eight weeks, she assesses all 600 students with a team of tutors who help her. From that, she builds homogeneously grouped reading classes across first and second grades and give them instructions to help move them forward, Florie explained.

She has six to eight tutors who help her, she continued, and as the program proceeds, she can see the students who struggle.

Florie noted she has three classes of children now who are struggling hard with social and emotional aspects.

"They can't cooperate, they just don't have those skills," she said. "I have a bird's eye perspective of this whole school, as I get to this side, I see the social and emotional needs of these kids."

### EARLY EDUCATION

Lori Doran, who facilitates the kindergarten and works with pre-kindergarten students, said the school district now has 100 pre-K children.

"We always put pride in our early intervention for kindergarten, but now we put more pride in the fact that we can get them earlier intervention so they can make a successful transition into kindergarten."

The schools' goal when a student enters kindergarten is for that child to get the basic language, literacy and math skills he or she needs to enter first grade, along with basic science and social studies knowledge and emotional and self-help skills, so that when the child goes to that primary grade, he or she is going to be successful learners, she said.

The district uses the Success For All program that focuses on development of the whole child, she said, including their getting along with others.

"We want kids to become self-regulated learners, not teacher-directed, and to become motivated on their own," she said.

"It takes a village to raise a child," commented Debbie DeBlasio, assistant to the superintendent. She said the district's intervention team members have the passion that they need to work with community agencies "to get our New Castle babies started on the right foot.

"Our children in New Castle need us," she said. "We are the first



Lisa Lontos



Cara Florie



Lori Doran



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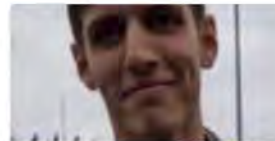
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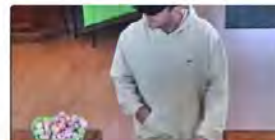
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Debbie Wachter

Debbie's been a Journalist at the New Castle News since 1978, and covers county government, police and fire, New Castle schools, environment and various other realms. She also writes features, takes photos and video and copy edits.

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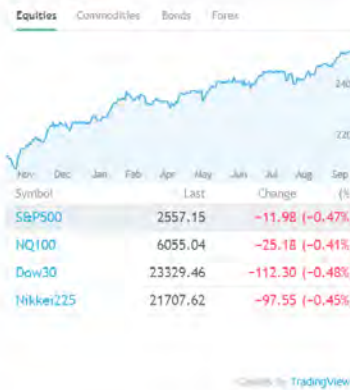
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