**Sandy Valley // Transcript**

Hi everyone! My name is Jen Veigel, and I oversee our three teams at Sandy Valley. My job during the day is, I am the Middle School Counselor. But I also serve as our Mental Health and Wellness Coordinate, Coordinator for the district.

And as Barbara was talking I also sit on our district leadership team, our PBIS team, and the Middle School. So I wear a lot of hats in the district. But at the same time it's beneficial when I sit on these different committees that I know and I'm able to share what we're doing.

This is year three for us. And we do have a team in our elementary, our middle school, and our high school. So I attend each of those meetings, but I sit on our Middle School team, as far as work that we do. And attend events at the elementary as well, because I also oversee our 21st Century Grant. So with 21st Century, there is a family component. So we work really hard with our family engagement team. And then, since I oversee 21st Century, like coordinating those event, so that we're using resources from 21st Century. Because a lot of times we want to run events, but we don't always have the financial resources to do that. So that has been a blessing for our elementary, that we're able to use those dollars to do family engagement.

And also, family engagement, you know, family engagement, 21st Century at the same time. What else I want to share?

So on each of our teams... We've been pretty lucky in the middle school with our parents. Our parents have been consistent, because I had relationships with them when I was at the elementary. Our elementary team, we've just added three new parents at the end of last year. So they have been a blessing. They come with the knowledge of the community, and they just want to do what's best for kids. And then, our high school team, we're kind of in transition. Our parents that we had, a couple our parents, their students graduated. So we are now trying to find new parents that are going to sit on that team.

And we've had some talk, because a lot of our parents have kids in multiple buildings. Like, do, where do we keep them? Do we keep them on the team they've been on? Are they going to transition? So we do have a couple parents that are, gonna this year sit on both our middle school and our high school team, because she has sixth graders and ninth graders. So she's familiar with that process on our high school team.

We do have a student, as Barbara said, she was part... Barbara came at the end of the year. We do one meeting at the end of the year where all three of our teams come together to plan our back to school bash, which is something that came out of family engagement. This was our second year for that, so the meeting she attended, that was kind of our year end celebrations.

And then just the plan for the back to school bash, what each building would look like, what we needed to add this year, what needed to be changed. So that student voice is really important. The trick is trying to find...our high school team meets at 7am, so just students that are willing to come at 7am.

So I know part of our meeting yesterday with our high school was looking at inviting a student from each grade level. Last year we just had one. That way we would have somebody that would be able to transition each year. So the one will, that's a freshman, her mom is the one that sits on our middle school team, is going to come to the high school team. So um we're looking forward to that as well. Because I know a lot of times we had these discussions and we make decisions as educators without parents and students in the room.

So I would say, family engagement, that has been one of the positives. I will say we struggled with that at first, like hearing that parent voice voice, and what we weren't doing right, and what we were thinking as educators. And that was hard for our principal to swallow at times and, you know, me to swallow at times and our PR person to swallow at times. But then obviously, it was constructive criticism. So just being willing to grow and being open-minded to those things. I know that was a growing process for each of our teams. But just thankful that, you know, we are able to, you know, partner with parents and get their perspective on what we need to do better. So that has been a blessing.

So I would say within our teams, we do have like a school member and then a parent that's kind of in charge of leading the team, as far as what that looks like. So that has been some struggles with finding parents as they transitioned or staff is a transition to find, what that looks like.

So at our elementary, I did a lot of the work. But I'm thankful I've kind of passed that off to one of our teacher. So he led our last meeting. So that takes a little bit off of my plate. So just, you know, giving other opportunities for staff members and parents to lead. That's not always easy, like for people that like to be in control, I know. That's me, and my middle school principal. But it's a blessing, you know, to pass that leadership off.

We do meet monthly, our elementary team and our middle school team and our high school team. Two of the teams meet in the morning and one meets after school, just availability of parents. I know that's kind of been a struggle of when we can get the availability of parents or even, you know, as you talked about earlier, getting teachers to stay after. So our middle school team meets after school. So our staff has been pretty accepting, just coming and staying for those meetings. It's once a month, usually last about 30 minutes at most, it just depends on if we have a big event coming up or not.

Every year we kind of look at our plans to make sure that we're doing some things consistently in each of the buildings. I know our middle school and high school we're a 6-12 building, so a lot of times we try to look at what we're doing in those plans so that they align. Or even when we're hosting, like, family nights and those kind of things. Since we're such a small district, if there's things that we can align that's to something that's already happening. That has really been our focus, because I know our first year we were planning events and no one was showing up and that was frustrating because we were putting the time into all that. So just kind of going back to the drawing board and figuring out, like, when do we have parents in the building and what can we do to add to that. What do our parents need and how can we support that?

We've tried to do the surveys. Sometimes we get the information back from families. I know we had our back to school bash this year and we had QR codes that they could fill out on the little scavenger hunt. And we were offering gift certificates to, like a local meet place had offered gift certificates. But just getting parents to, you know, it was right there. I know that night we were a little disappointed we only had 10 surveys. So then we did push that out via email and then we use Dojo in our middle school and Blooms in our elementary.

So another focus for us has just been communication, what our parents need, what that looks like. I know we were using different things in our elementary, in our middle school. So I know next year we're going to align in our elementary and middle school, are going to all use Dojo to communicate home. And then, I know we had a couple high school parents, they have freshman, like how do we get information as high school parents, like you don't have Dojo anymore, so what that looks like for high school. They do send out monthly newsletters and that also goes out in our middle school and our elementary.

So our next goal is to communicate a text, because you know most people have information on their phone and it comes through a text. So that is something we've kind of talked about as well. And I guess going back to kind of our 21st Century with that.

We have two local partners. We have a nonprofit, the BEN, which is they kind of do STEM activities for our families, and then, our Sandy Valley Local Library. So those are our two partners for our 21st Century Grant. So a lot of times, anytime we do a family engagement activity in any of our buildings, they are willing to jump on board. So we have those Community Partnerships that were in place because of 21st Century. But then they've also expanded out to support other events that we do.

So Jen you you're amazing!

I don't know about all that, but thank you!

Well I'm here to testify, you're amazing! I was intrigued myself about a parent and staff member leading.

So yeah, I mean, that's been, you know, that's, we're trying to transition to that of what that looks like, of what a parent looks like, you know, just that shared responsibility, you know, just... I think if we have parents and staff leading then we see each other as, you know, the same level. Because I think sometimes, you know, parents come under our building and have this view of staff that, you know, they're saying oh they're better than us. So just kind of having that playing field, like we're all in this room together. Because we want to do what's best for kids, you know, in our district.

Yeah. I imagine that's, both, on both ends for both for parents and for staff to see, like, we've got this supportive parent who's really rolling up their sleeves with us. And it's like a decision-making thing.

If I go back to the six types, right, it's not not 100 parents, but there are some parents that have the time and the interest to do that. And I just think it's phenomenal the way that you're doing that. And I also think it's really cool how you, this, that you're really like mindful, like the transitioning of families from building to building and carrying that over in your teams. And then you talked about consistency too, of you know, having the teams and then being able to look at consistency because your teams are sort of sharing ideas. So I want to open it up though, just for, you know, a couple folks to ask questions here. Just if, just maybe raise your hand or raise your real hand or raise your your reaction hand. Any questions for Jen, or comments?

Jen, this is Christa.

Hi Christa!

Hi! You did a great job! Can you describe, because I know this but can you talk a little bit about the method behind the madness of bringing all of the teams together and kind of, because that was really powerful and that was when Dr. Boone was able to see that but the there was a a certain kind of synergy when that happened and how all of the different APTs really fed off each other. Can you share some of the wisdom behind that please?

Sure. We've actually done that the last two years, like our last meeting in May, just because the back to school bash, that's not one building, that's our district. And know, like, the first year we did the back to school bash. A lot of that work fell on me and I'm like I can't do this. So how do we fix this? I guess some of my intentions were a little bit selfish, but then just to bring everybody together. Because we're such a small district, I mean our buildings are on one campus.

And you know a lot of the parents have kids in multiple buildings. So just putting all the people in the same room that are going to be working for that day. Because a lot of the parents already have relationships you know, because of sports and because of what their kids do, or being on the PTO or the soccer league you know. A lot of our parents do all the things, just like all our staff do all the things.

So it was just a matter of that was our last meeting before the back to school bash in August. And come August we really aren't going to have time to meet, because we're back to school and here we go, and it's time for this event. So that was our time to get all the pieces in order for that event. Because the first year we did it, that was probably the most positive feedback we've had from families, just everything that was offered. So we wanted to continue to offer those same things but see if there were other things that we could bring in to support our families.

Thank you for sharing! That it's kind of, that was some low hanging fruit. And I think sometimes we don't think about the value of bringing all the teams together. Many times we've kept them separate, but there was something about how they all could collectively come together to work. So thank you!

Yeah!

And Jen, I I do want to thank you! And I, you know, to want to... sometimes we think about, sometimes we plan family engagement with more like what we need as a school to get done or how we're thinking about things: our schedule, our timing. And then other times we take on a lens of like being more family-centered, like what's it like for our families. And so I love the way that you're thinking about well what's it like for a family who goes from these schools using Dojo to hear and what's it like for family you know how could we make that if you've got three kids across the district in different places. How can we kind of make this a little simpler for you? So I just, I think that's a really neat thing that your team is doing.

So just, everyone please join me and thanking Jen! She's got to run to another meeting and we got her in quick here so she could go do more.

All right! Yes thank you! I appreciate it!

All right! Thanks Jen!

All right! Have a great day everyone! Bye!