

— TREE —

Transforming Rural Experience in Education

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Director



Students at Milbridge Elementary

For most educators, the start of the school year is a time associated with reflection, hope, and renewed commitments. For me, it has also been a time when I think about the fact that school is not a level playing field for children. This awareness has dominated my work for many years. It did not make me dislike my job, become less committed, or drop into a negative funk. Rather, my realization that education was not serving as an equalizer resulted in frustration that I seemed to be doing things the same way, getting the same results, and relying on outside experts to solve the challenges of my school and community. This was certainly one of the reasons I was most drawn to TREE.

When I first encountered TREE, I heard people who cared passionately about education and equity talking about changing the odds for

children and making connections between advances in neuroscience, child development, and the importance of relationships. For the first time I was encountering a way of looking at challenging student behavior and limited academic success that no longer blamed students, but looked to the root causes of behavior and then worked to change the adult response to such behaviors.

I had spent so many years trying to solve problems by hacking at the leaves and not digging down into the roots. Now 15 months after becoming the Director of TREE, I am confident that TREE's collaborative and systemic approach to supporting students, parents, teachers, and communities is the hopeful approach we have long needed in our schools.

TREE's response and model design is rooted in an understanding and respect for the community, which only comes through a commitment to thoughtful listening. As we reported in our Spring newsletter, TREE interviewed and listened to 22 administrators and conducted focus groups with 131 teachers and 186 students in Washington County to inform program de-

sign. TREE also took care to listen to parents and an array of non-profits working throughout Washington County. We knew the importance of gaining a true sense of both the strengths and challenges for Washington County schools and communities. TREE filled itself with this knowledge and then, in collaboration with educators and researchers from Colby College and the University of Maine, we entered an intensive design process.

With thoughtful listening as a foundation, TREE is now poised to begin working in 3 pilot schools here in Washington County. Milbridge Elementary School has been selected as the first pilot school to receive the full TREE pyramid of supports, with Jonesport Elementary School and Charlotte Elementary School receiving support for meeting basic needs and mental health supports onsite in the first year and then moving to the full model of supports in year two.

Our model design is represented in this pyramid, in which all levels are clearly rooted in collaboration and partnership with the school and community.



Our model design is represented in this pyramid.

TREE is not coming in to impose a model or dictate changes.

Rather, TREE will support schools in meeting basic needs by facilitating a greater connection and sharing of resources, providing mental health supports onsite for students, and using a full time coaching model to build Social and Emotional Learning for all and to increase opportunities for student voice and empowerment. Additionally, TREE will support instructional strategies in the classroom and leadership development.