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Finding a place to grow

Private school focuses on the whole child

By Tracy Ouellette
EDITOR

When Laura Rauman saw her daughter's special education needs weren't being met, she decided to do something about it.

"The inspiration to start Bloom 360 came from my daughter when her needs were brought to light and what we were doing wasn't working and I thought, 'Maybe there's a better way,'" Rauman said.

Bloom 360 Learning Community in East Troy is the result of six years of work to bring that inspiration to reality. The private, year-round school teaches students, ages 5 to 21, with neurodiverse needs.

It is estimated about 20 percent of school-age children in the United States have neurodiverse needs and need more than a traditional classroom setting to learn and thrive.

According to the 2011 National Symposium on Neurodiversity at Syracuse University, neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include people labeled with dyspraxia, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyscalculia, autistic spectrum, Tourette Syndrome and others.

Bloom 360 employs a team of teachers, therapists and social workers who use an education model designed to support and nurture the whole child, starting with the emotional needs and progressing to the academic needs, Rauman said.

"We're not trying to correct a behavior; we're looking at the child's development and meeting them where they're at," Rauman said. "It's a tried and true way to teach, and it works."

The school's literature states the roots of Bloom's educational model



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Bloom 360 Learning Community integrates the mind, body and spirit into its lessons. The large cloth swings are a big draw for both students and staff. The relaxed setting often prompts the students to be more open and vocal with their teachers.

identifies and nurtures each learner's strengths, cultivates positive and authentic relationships and supports and guides each student's growth from their developmental uniqueness.

The school does this by using an interest-driven, project-based learning curriculum with individualized academics in math, reading/language, arts, social studies and science. The school also incorporates a great deal of movement and emotional support into these lessons.

"We focus a lot on the social and emotional learning and work on supporting those needs because we can't get to the academics until that's strengthened," Rauman said. "It's all about building the relation-

ship with the child, building the trusting relationship so they know they can open up to us and come to us.

"Sometimes these kids just shut down, and here we give them a safe space and they know they're heard and listened to."

Helping the kids find their purpose in life is something the school and staff take seriously.

"We ask them who they are inside," Rauman said. "We want to know what they think their inner purpose is. We're not here just to focus on building skills. We're here to help them find their place in the world."

One way they build the spirit is by teaching the kids to identify their

emotions and apply them to their actions.

Naming those emotions can sometimes be a struggle for these kids, and the staff promotes a reflective time at the end of each day to help them see how emotions and actions are intertwined.

"They start naming their emotions and seeing things differently, Rauman said. "They'll say things like 'I used my bravery today' after they tried something new."

Another important component to the curriculum at Bloom 360 is movement. Rauman said giving the kids a way to channel their energy during the school day is essential.

• **Private school** (Continued from front page)

"We get them moving all day long," she said. "They need that outlet."

Rauman said her own daughter, Morgan, struggled with learning math concepts until her teacher created a hide-and-seek game where Morgan had to find the answers to the problems away from her desk.

"Then it just clicked for her," Rauman said.

Learning by doing

With a project-based curriculum at the center of the school's learning, students are encouraged to direct their studies into areas they are keenly interested in.

"It starts with a question – What do I want to learn?" Bloom Communications Director Dawn Frasa said. "Then they create a detailed project plan and look at the steps in the project."

"It's highly customized to each child," Rauman said.

One student has taken an interest in cooking and baking from the simple mixing of premeasured ingredients to baking complicated desserts and cooking entire meals. The student cooks special meals



SUBMITTED PHOTO *East Troy News*

Bloom 360 Learning Community student Sara makes meringues for her fellow classmates and teachers. Sara is interested in a career in culinary arts.



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Bloom 360 Learning Community student Darren (left) searches for photos of different emotions to create visual aids to help students at the school identify feelings. Learning guide Zach Moffatt assists Darren by prompting him to express which emotion he sees in the photo and why.



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Bloom 360 Learning Community student Morgan is encouraged to continue with her math problems by teacher Mandy Clapper (front, right) and her mom, Laura Rauman.

for the students and staff on a regular basis.

"She's making a cookbook now," Frasa said.

Another student, Frasa's son, has shown strong organizational talents, so he has been put in charge of planning all of the travel for field trips and training for the school.

"It's all about the deal for him," Frasa said with a laugh.

Rauman said helping the students progress through the different stages and seeing their confidence grow and the joy at sharing their talents with others is exactly why she founded the school.

"We've spent a lot of time creating this curriculum. Putting all these elements together looks seamless, but a lot of work goes on behind the scenes. And to see it work so well, to see a student thrive and grow, it shows we're on the right path."

"It's life-changing for the learners and the families – everyone is blooming," Frasa added.

Bloom 360 Learning Community is in East Troy's old Stone School, which was built in 1858.

Before it opened in the fall of 2017, the property was extensively remodeled to create a bright and friendly space to meet the needs of the students. The school is on the corner of Highway L and Stone School Road at N8921 Stone School Road.

The school's home district is Waterford, and students can earn either a diploma or certificate of completion upon graduation. The school is accepting new students.

The school has a fundraiser golf outing planned for Oct. 4 and is looking for sponsors.

For more information about the school or how to donate, visit www.bloom360.org or call 414-935-6360.