



With Wean grant, principals to help young learners thrive

By [Denise Dick](#)

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YOUNGSTOWN

The earlier a child is exposed to education, the more successful he or she will be in school and beyond.

That's why the Raymond John Wean Foundation offers a grant allowing 10 elementary-school principals in the Mahoning Valley to attend workshops by Community Advocates for Young Learners Institute, Cambridge, Mass.

"There have been many studies that have shown how important it is to invest in the early years of a child's education," said Valora Washington, president of the institute.

When a child's education begins early, such as when a child is younger than 6, he or she is more successful in high school and in life, she said.

They are less likely to get into trouble and less likely to require special-education programs, Washington said.

Later in life, those individuals are more likely to earn higher incomes and to own homes, she said.

The participating principals last month attended the institute's national conference, "Ready Schools: Your Leadership in Systems that Help Young Learners to Thrive." A series of workshops is planned throughout the year.

Washington said principals set the tone and provide leadership in schools, setting the direction for teachers and students.

Joe DiLoreto, principal at Jackson-Milton Elementary School, is one of those participating.

"Every child — regardless of where they come from or their background — every child can learn,"

DiLoreto said.

Some of the things he plans to do beginning this year aim to make the school a more welcoming place.

Posting room numbers outside of the classrooms, making it easier for children to know where their classes are, is one example.

“We want to make it an inviting atmosphere first,” DiLoreto said.

Principals are encouraged to set goals for their individual schools in three areas: parent engagement, transitions or assessment.

“Everyone needs to be engaged,” Washington said. Parental engagement “is a strong predictor of achievement.”

Transitions refers to not only students switching from grade to grade and school to school but also to time during the school day when children are between learning sessions.

“It’s the time they’re lining up to go to lunch or lining up to go to the restroom,” Washington said.

There are ways to cut down on that time, allowing more time for learning, she said.

Assessment is measurable data such as improvements in test scores or learning ways to better interpret and apply that data.