

Hamilton Elementary School

Four years ago, those numbers felt out of reach for [Hamilton Elementary](#). Reading scores were critically low. Absenteeism was high. And most families—many of whom spoke languages other than English—felt disconnected from what was happening inside the classroom.

“We had a trust gap,” says Brittany Daley, principal of Hamilton. “Families didn’t feel seen, heard, or welcomed. And without that connection, it was hard for kids to thrive.”

Daley knew that if things were going to change, families had to feel like true partners—not just participants. That meant opening doors, shifting mindsets, and finding tools that made communication easy and inclusive.

One small chain, one big shift

Daley started with a gesture: she placed a blue chair in the back of every classroom.

It was an invitation—for any caregiver to come observe, connect, and see learning in action. No sign-up needed. Just show up.

“Some teachers were skeptical,” she admits. “But the chair wasn’t about disruption. It was a signal: families belong here. Their presence matters.”

It was the first step in reshaping how families experienced the school. But for it to work, they needed consistent, welcoming communication—and that’s where ClassDojo came in.

Translating trust

Hamilton adopted ClassDojo to help teachers and staff communicate with families across languages and literacy levels. Messages were automatically translated. Photos and videos from class created an open window into learning. And families had a simple way to message back without fear of misunderstanding or needing a translator.

“ClassDojo made it easy to communicate clearly and respectfully with every family,” says Daley. “It was the foundation for trust.” That trust turned into participation. And participation turned into partnership.

20%

drop in absenteeism

“We weren’t just asking families to help—we were equipping them to feel confident doing it. And that changed everything.”



Brittany Daley
Principal of Hamilton



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Joy first, learning second

Daley's team didn't start with academic asks. They focused first on bringing families into the building first, without pressure or expectations.

There were after-school art classes. Monthly Family Fridays. A Halloween costume drive with games and candy. A Read Across America celebration where teachers handed out Play-Doh.

"These events weren't about teaching," says Daley. "They were about joy. And once you build joy and trust, families start showing up for more."

And show up they did. Over time, 10 families became 200. Many began running their own initiatives—like a clothing boutique, a food distribution center, and a family book club.

Tying it back to learning

With relationships in place, the school began adding academic layers to family engagement. When the schoolwide focus was phonics, teachers sent home personalized activities based on each student's assessment results.

"It was a huge mindset shift," Daley explains. "We weren't just asking families to help—we were equipping them to feel confident doing it. And that changed everything."

Today, nearly half of Hamilton students are reading on grade level—up from just 9% a few years ago. Chronic absenteeism has dropped by more than 20 percentage points. And family involvement is not only consistent, it's self-sustaining.

The bottom line

"When families are engaged, kids succeed," Daley says. "We treat those things like they're separate. But they're not. They're completely connected."

At Hamilton Elementary, connection started with a chair. It grew with ClassDojo.

