**Education Club creating a pipeline for future teachers**

It’s after school on Wednesday at Frances Scott Elementary, and 17 students have willingly stayed behind for a surprising reason – to practice school.

“We’re going to run through some scenarios,” explains Sean Mills, one of three teachers in the classroom. “Think about what you would do if you were the teacher. Table talk.”

He slides a worksheet under the projector: “One student is doing all the work in their group’s activity. Their peers are messing around. How would you make sure everyone contributes and has their voice heard?”

Students consider, then share out. Some choose immediate discipline while others opt for a softer approach. “I’d probably sit with that group and explain why each person has to do something,” one girl contributes.

Welcome to Education Club, a unique experiment aiming to inspire future teachers who – after some growing and a few diplomas – will hopefully return to this very school and start the process anew.

Club rules are straightforward. Any 5th or 6th grader at Scott with an interest in teaching was invited to join. Members must maintain quality classwork to participate in visits to younger classes once a week, where they’re expected to observe teaching methods, help out where asked, and jot notes to address in their bi-weekly group meeting after school.

“Some have been tasked with being a one-on-one helper with students who need additional support, others are asked to help whenever they see something that needs to be done in the classroom,” says Ian McKinley, one of the teachers who advises the students. “We’re still in the early stages of this club and students will be given more responsibilities as the year progresses.”

Lindsey is a sixth grader who joined to experience what being a teacher is like. She describes the first time she stood in front of a classroom of younger students as “nerve-wracking, with lots of eyes staring at me and kids talking a lot.” She loves it now and has dreams of becoming a 7th grade history teacher.

Another 6th grade club member, Sussity, wants to teach kindergarteners.

“They’re sweet and cute and they listen,” she says, underlining a common grievance among club members. “The biggest challenge is getting kids to pay attention.”

Fifth grade club member Anya says the club experience is making her more attentive with her own teachers.
“When I think of myself in the teacher’s position, I now know how it would feel kind of to have a classroom full of people and have put so much time into something when nobody listens, and you feel like they don’t care.”

Sarah Hawkes attended this school from kindergarten to sixth grade. The first in her family to attend college, she now teaches first grade at Scott and is helping with the club. Her sixth-grade son, Brandon, is a member.

“I always wanted to come back and teach in this community, to give back to here,” Sarah says, adding that sharing her example is why she’s involved. “I built a good life for myself, and I know my son sees that. I’m a single parent for two boys, and this is a great career to have time with them while being able to provide for them. We live in a community with struggles, but so many options exist for these kids.”

Sarah says the club can be a silly place for kids to just connect as kids, but it’s most gratifying when she sees the students take charge.

“Seeing them with the kids in class in a leadership role is just beautiful,” she says. “Watching them actually engage in a mature way to help a younger student.”

Ian says another benefit of the club is that it’s giving students of color a chance to envision themselves as educators. While the racial and ethnic diversity of K-12 public school teachers has increased in recent decades, it hasn’t kept pace with the rapid growth in student diversity, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

“When we were starting this, we discussed how there’s no real route to get experience as an educator for students, especially those from underserved backgrounds,” he says. “We wanted to ensure that the students in our school were able to see teaching as a real option for themselves in their futures rather than something that would be unattainable.”

Amiyah, a club sixth grader, sums it up: “I want a chance to become a teacher, figure out how to motivate kids and influence them to do their best.”