

## Coronavirus

## Children 'overwhelmed'

## Schools embrace social and emotional learning

PAW PAW, Mich., Dec 20, (AP): On a windy December morning in rural southwest Michigan, an American flag flapped at half-staff outside Paw Paw Early Elementary School. A social worker with a miniature therapy dog named Trixie offered comfort at the entry doors.

Children wearing face masks scampered off buses into the morning chill, some stooping to pet the shaggy pup before ambling inside.

Like kids in so many cities and towns around the globe, the youngsters in Michigan's Van Buren Intermediate School District have been through a lot these past few years. A relentless pandemic that continues to disrupt classrooms, sicken friends and loved ones, and has left some district families jobless and homeless. Three student suicide attempts since in-person school resumed full-time this fall, two student suicides last year. And now, a deadly shooting just two days earlier at a school a few hours away.

But with an infusion of federal COVID relief money and state funding this year plus a belief among local school officials that kids can't succeed academically if they are struggling emotionally, every child in this district's 11 schools is receiving extra help.

In a school year that was supposed to be a return to normal but has proven anything but, the district has launched an educational program based on a

key component of modern psychology — cognitive behavior therapy. Principles of this method are embedded in the curriculum and are part of the district's full embrace of social and emotional learning.

Students in every grade are taught how thoughts, feelings and behaviors are linked and how learning how to control and reframe thoughts can lead to more positive outcomes. The program includes more intensive lessons for kids struggling with anxiety, depression or trauma, along with sessions on suicide prevention. All district employees learn about the concepts.

## Attention

While schools in the US and elsewhere are increasingly teaching social and emotional learning skills, many use a more piecemeal approach, creating a designated class for talking about feelings, or focusing that attention only on the most troubled kids. Many lack funding and resources to adopt the kind of comprehensive approach that Paw Paw and its neighbor schools are attempting, weaving evidence-based psychology methods into the curriculum and involving all students and staff.

Effective social and emotional learning doesn't happen "only at certain times of the day or with certain people," it should be reflected in all school operations and practices, said Olga Acosta Price, director of the national Center for Health and Health Care in Schools. With disruptions from the pandemic so widespread, that kind of approach is needed "now more than ever," she said.

As second-graders at Paw Paw Early Elementary sat crossed-legged on the floor on this December day, they received an introduction from their teacher and a video presentation, learning how to identify, manage and reframe "big" feelings like anxiety, anger and sadness.

The youngsters were given an example: Feeling angry and yelling at your mom because she forgot to buy your favorite breakfast cereal. That makes you more upset and your mom feel sad. Instead, remember that you also like waffles and could ask her nicely to make some, leading you both to feel happier as you begin your day.

At the adjoining elementary school for older grades, in a group session for more at-risk kids, four fifth graders practiced a mindfulness exercise, slowly breathing in and out while using a forefinger to trace up and down the fingers on the other hand. Behavior specialist Eric Clark, wearing a black face mask printed with the message, "Be Nice," led the session, calmly accepting a defiant girl's refusal to participate.

Clark said that since school resumed, he's seen kids with lots of anxiety, thoughts of self-harm and feeling "completely overwhelmed, they just don't want to do it anymore."

"I think we're starting to see some of the effects of the past few years," he said. "The extra stresses of not knowing what's next and not knowing if we're going to have school because we have too many cases or not knowing if another variant has come in or not knowing if somebody has a job still."

Clark said the psychology-focused program the district has adopted, dubbed "TRAILS" by its University of Michigan creators, is helping everyone manage the challenges.

Abby Olmstead, a dark-haired, dark-eyed 10-year-old girl with a splash of freckles across her nose, says the finger-breathing exercise calms her and that working with Clark "has been helping me a lot."

"He always makes me laugh when I have anxiety, and that's not a bad thing," she said.

Her mom, Dawn Olmstead, said Abby struggled with on-line school last year and is learning how to better manage her frustrations.

More than 1,000 district employees, even bus drivers, have received training in the program.

## Performance

"From the superintendent on down to every staff person, we have said you need to know what makes kids tick," said Corey Harbaugh, Paw Paw schools' curriculum director. "You need to be better at that so that every adult a student comes into contact with — from the moment they get on a bus in the morning, the moment they get off in the afternoon — every adult has been trained and has been given some tools to work with kids around social, emotional skills."

Some parents have questioned the approach, arguing that their kids are "well-regulated" and don't need it. And some mistakenly think social and emotional learning is somehow related to a method of understanding American racism called critical race theory.

Harbaugh doesn't back down. Studies have shown that social and emotional learning programs can improve academic performance, classroom behavior and stress management. Research also suggests TRAILS lessons for at-risk kids can reduce depression and improve coping skills.

Almost 700 US schools have paid contracts to receive support and implement the program. Its website provides free online materials that are downloaded more than 2,000 times daily, and users come from all over the world, said Elizabeth Koschmann, a University of Michigan researcher who developed the program. Those downloads have skyrocketed during the pandemic.

She said schools contact her almost daily, asking "how how they can possibly keep up with students who are falling apart, staff who are losing morale and experiencing tremendous burnout, and just a pervasive sense of exhaustion, despair, and hopelessness."

Evidence supporting the need for more attention to students' mental well-being is plentiful.

US emergency rooms have seen a surge in kids with mental health crises including suicidal behavior, depression and eating disorders. Pediatric mental health therapists are scarce in many areas and kids often wait months for outpatient treatment.

In a December 7 public health advisory, US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy cited research showing that depression and anxiety symptoms doubled among youth worldwide during the pandemic. Expanding school-based programs is among his recommendations.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is among groups that recently made similar recommendations in declaring children's faltering mental health a national emergency.



Murthy



Second-graders hold their heads as they talk about 'thoughts' and how they compare with 'feelings' and resulting 'actions,' at Paw Paw Elementary School on Thursday, Dec. 2, in Paw Paw, Michigan. Their teacher is one of many in the school trained to use a curriculum created at the University of Michigan called TRAILS. (AP)



Space flight participant Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa is assisted as he disembarks from a helicopter as he arrives at the airport after returning from the International Space Station on the Soyuz MS-20 space capsule, in Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Monday, Dec. 20. (AP)



Otto



Zirkelbach

## Discovery

**'Don't blame climate change':** Don't blame climate change for the devastating Madagascar drought and famine, scientists said in a new analysis.

World Weather Attribution, which does real time studies of extreme weather throughout the world, examined the drought, which has left Madagascar with 60% of its normal rainfall from July 2019 to June 2021.

The group found no statistically significant fingerprint of human-caused climate change. Instead, the drought was a random weather quirk, one that has a chance of happening once every 135 years or so, the researchers concluded.

"It's a rare event but it's within natural variability," said study co-author Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at the Imperial College of London. "For this type of low rainfall, climate change is not a main driver."

In Madagascar, swings of rainfall from high to low are common, Otto said. But starvation has another big cause, she said.

"The driver of the famine or the food security is very much the high vulnerability of the people of the region," Otto said. "There's shockingly high poverty rates."

The team of international scientists relied on established technique of using computer simulations to figure out what would happen in a world without nearly 2.2 degrees (1.2 degrees Celsius) of warming over pre-industrial times and comparing it to what happened. With this method, the scientists have found many weather extremes to be worsened by global warming, including this summer's heat wave in the US Pacific Northwest and western Canada and deadly European flooding.

The latest study has not been peer reviewed yet. (AP)

**20 sea turtles flown to Fla:** Twenty critically endangered juvenile Kemp's ridley sea turtles were flown from New England to the subtropical Florida Keys to convalesce at the Marathon Turtle Hospital after being rescued from Cape Cod Bay's frigid coastal waters.

Each of the turtles suffers from "cold stunning," a hypothermic reaction that occurs when sea turtles are exposed to cold water for a prolonged time, according to hospital manager Bette Zirkelbach. They arrived Friday by private plane.

"These sea turtles are at the Turtle Hospital in the Florida Keys to warm up just like the tourists that come to the Keys to warm up," said Zirkelbach. "The Kemp's ridley is the most critically endangered sea turtle in the world, so it's important to help these little ones survive."

The flight transport to Florida Keys Marathon International Airport was conducted in collaboration with Turtles Fly Too, a nonprofit group that engages gen-

## Space

## Turkey's Turksat 5B heads to orbit

## Japanese space tourists return to Earth

MOSCOW, Dec 20, (Agencies): A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth on Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station.

Fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa, his producer Yozo Hirano and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin made a soft landing in a Russian Soyuz capsule in the steppes of Kazakhstan at 9:13 a.m. (0313 GMT) about 148 kilometers (about 92 miles) southeast of the city of Zhezkazgan.

Low clouds prevented the deployment of search-and-rescue helicopters to the area, so rescue teams reached the landing site in all-terrain vehicles to assist the crew and conduct medical check-ups. They reported that the trio was feeling fine.

Maezawa, 46, and his 36-year-old producer Hirano were the first self-paying tourists to visit the space station since 2009. Misurkin was on his third space mission.

Speaking to The Associated Press last week in a live interview from the orbiting space station, Maezawa said that "once you are in space, you realize how much it is worth it by having this amazing experience."

Asked about reports claiming that he paid over \$80 million for the 12-day mission, Maezawa said he couldn't disclose the contract sum but admitted that he paid "pretty much" that amount.

In October, Russian actor Yulia Peresild and film director Klim Shipenko spent 12 days on the station to make the world's first movie in orbit, a project sponsored by Russia's space corporation Roscosmos to help burnish the nation's reputation for space glory.

Staying behind at the station are NASA astronauts Raja Chari, Thomas Marshburn, Kayla Barron and Mark Vande Hei; Russian cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov; and Matthias Maurer of the European Space Agency.

Speaking to the AP from orbit, Maezawa deflected criticism from those who questioned his decision to spend money on space travel instead of using it to help people back on Earth, saying that "those who criticize are perhaps those who have never been to space."

He said he felt "a little bit of motion sickness" and it was "a little bit difficult to sleep," adding that future space tourists should be prepared to spend up to five days adapting to zero gravity. Maezawa said he was happy with

the length of his trip, saying that "12 days was about right for me" to adapt to the motion sickness and enjoy the rest of the flight.

After asking the public for ideas before the flight, Maezawa had compiled a list of 100 things to do in space that included playing some sports inside the space station such as badminton, table tennis and golf.

Space Adventures, a Virginia-based company that organized his flight, previously sent seven other tourists to the space station between 2001 and 2009.

Maezawa made his fortune in retail fashion, launching Japan's largest online fashion mall, Zozotown. Forbes magazine has estimated his net worth at \$1.9 billion.

The tycoon has also booked a flyby around the moon aboard Elon Musk's Starship and will be joined on that trip by eight contest winners. He said he plans to undertake that mission in 2023.

Turkey's new communication satellite Turksat 5B has been successfully launched by the US aerospace company SpaceX on Sunday, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Adil Karaismailoglu announced.

The launch from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida took place at 6:59 a.m., Turkish time (03:59 GMT), Anadolu Agency quoted the minister as saying.

The satellite will reach 42 degrees East orbit in 164 days and then a 45-day test process will begin, the minister noted.

Turksat 5B, produced by Airbus with contributions from Turkey's domestic industry, was transferred from France to the US on November 29.

It is the most powerful Turkish satellite so far and will increase the Ka-Band capacity by more than 15 times, he added.

With a lifespan of more than 35 years and next generation electric-powered propulsion system, the satellite is capable of transmitting data at more than 55 gigabits in total.

Besides Turkey, it will cover the entire Middle East, Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Mediterranean, North and East Africa, Nigeria, South Africa, and neighboring countries.

In a video message, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed the launch as another "moment of pride for Turkey and the Turkish nation," according to AA report.

"Today, we launched Turksat 5B,

the most powerful and highest-capacity communication satellite of our country, into space. In this satellite project, we also opted for SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket," he said.

Erdogan also thanked Elon Musk, the founder of SpaceX, for not bowing to "the blackmail and pressures of the anti-Turkey lobbies."

He had held a video call with Musk yesterday to discuss the launching process.

Another of Turkey's satellites, Turksat 5A, was also launched by SpaceX in January.

With Turksat 5B, Turkey currently has a total of eight active satellites.

**Also:** **KINGSLAND, Ga.:** A federal agency expects to announce its decision Monday on whether to allow a launchpad that would send commercial rockets into space from coastal Georgia.

However, the Federal Aviation Administration is emphasizing that a license authorizing Camden County to operate a spaceport would not yet permit the launch of any rockets.

In a letter released Friday by the FAA, the agency said a more comprehensive review would be needed before any rockets can be launched from Georgia.

Even if the license for Spaceport Camden is approved, "it would not authorize a single launch," an FAA executive wrote to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"Simply put: to obtain a Vehicle Operator License, many more reviews remain, and no outcome is guaranteed," the letter stated.

Any company seeking to launch from the site would need to obtain a Vehicle Operator License and undergo a separate environmental and safety evaluation, according to the FAA.

Camden County, in the southeastern corner of the state, has spent nearly 10 years and \$10 million pursuing the goal of having what would be the nation's newest commercial spaceport.

Supporters say it would give the county a huge economic boost and allow Georgia to join the commercial space race that's sent increasing numbers of civilians and celebrities into space in recent months.

Critics contend the proposed site would endanger residents of Little Cumberland Island, which has about 40 homes, though few people live there year round, and visitors to federally protected Cumberland Island, which lie in the planned flight path for rockets.

eral aviation pilots who donate their aircraft, fuel and time to provide emergency transportation for rescued sea turtles. (AP)

**Conservationists sue:** Conservationists are suing three federal agencies over the adequacy of an environmental review the government has said satisfies requirements to resume the killing of coyotes,



An intubated COVID-19 patient gets treatment at the intensive care unit at the Westerstede Clinical Center, a military-civilian hospital in Westerstede, northwest Germany, Dec. 17. As hospitals across Europe brace themselves for a surge in coronavirus cases over the holiday season because of the new omicron variant, Westerstede Clinical Center is cautiously hopeful it can weather the storm. (AP)

mountain lions and other wildlife in federally protected wilderness areas in Nevada.

The move comes five years after the US Agriculture Department's Wildlife Services division settled a similar lawsuit by suspending the operations aimed at protecting livestock from predators.

The WildEarth Guardians group long has battled Wildlife Services over the predator management program that Congress approved in 1931 and costs US taxpayers millions of dollars annually.

The program allows USDA to "eradicate, suppress or bring under control" native species — including mountain lions, bears, wolves, coyotes and bobcats — "for the benefit of agribusiness."

The New Mexico-based environmental group and the Idaho-based Western Watersheds Project filed the lawsuit in US District Court in Reno.

It accuses the agency of failing to fully disclose or adequately analyze the impacts of its plan to expand use of aerial gunning from small planes and helicopters and poisoning and trapping of the animals on Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service lands in Nevada. Those two agencies are also named as defendants in the lawsuit.

The conservationists claim Wildlife Services routinely ignores the science about the efficacy of what they characterize as a "large-scale slaughter" program which kills 1.3 million native species across the US annually. (AP)