



# How One School District is Transforming Its Character & Resiliency Efforts

Frisco ISD and the EVERFI Impact Framework

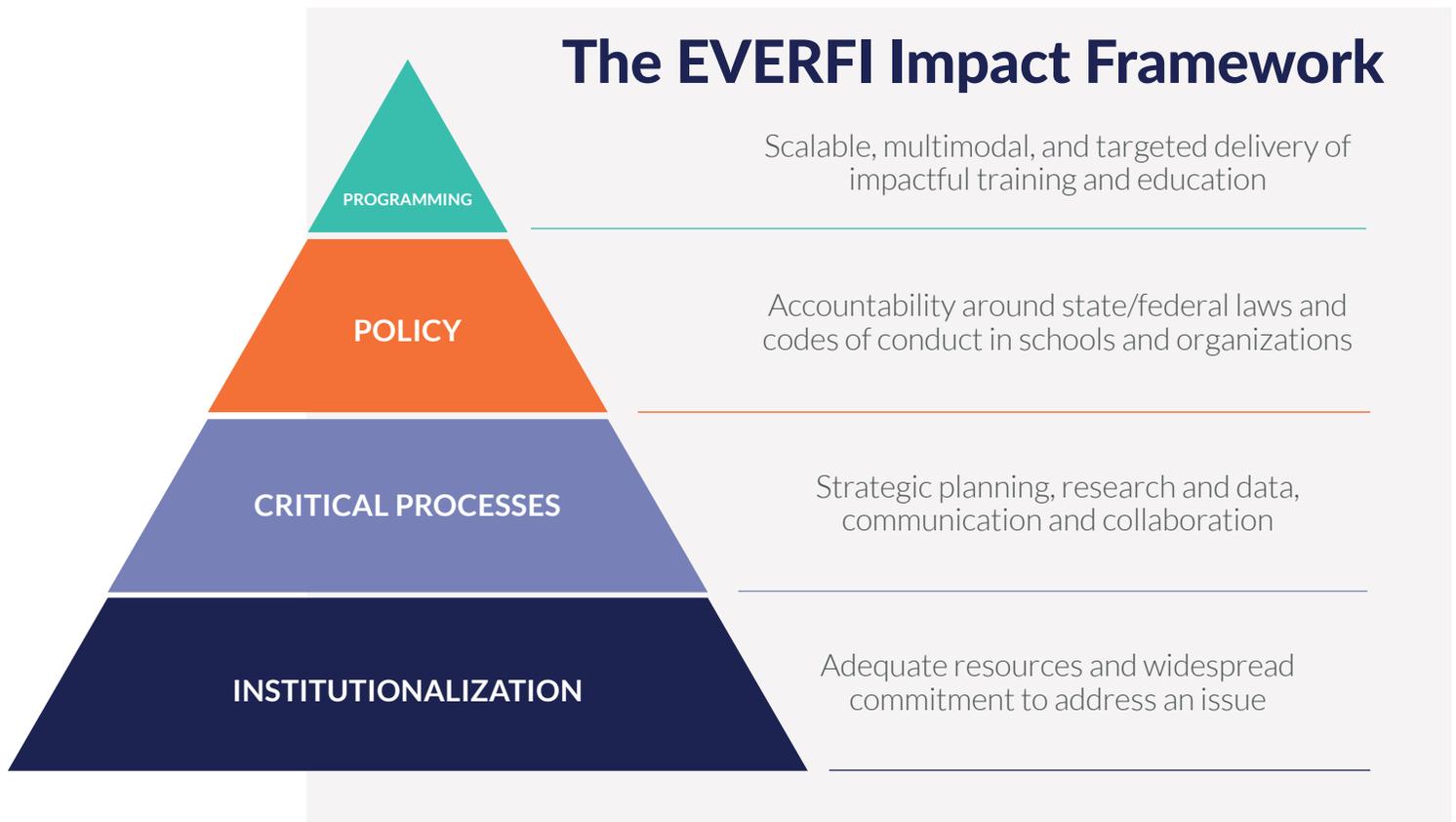
EVERFI

# How One School District is Transforming Its Character & Resiliency Efforts

School districts across the country have reached an inflection point regarding critical health, wellness, and safety issues impacting their students: mental health, bullying, and navigating social and online challenges.

Leaders at all levels of educational systems see unprecedented accountability from stakeholders. The expectation: do more and better work to get ahead of these challenges. This rightful call to action underscores the need for system-wide approach to character and resiliency education.

To that end, EVERFI has developed a research-backed, public health framework to drive individual and institutional impact. This approach centers around four critical components of a comprehensive strategy: programming, policies, critical processes, and institutionalization. Viewed as a pyramid, each of these components relies upon the foundational elements below and supports the elements above.



This framework is a powerful tool that can enable school districts to better engage in the comprehensive and strategic approach necessary to make a transformative impact-- both on its students, and on its community. In this case study, we spotlight one of EVERFI's partner school districts, Frisco Independent School District in North Texas, who is making a meaningful impact on its community members and share insights into the actions that they are taking at each level of this framework.

## About Frisco Independent School District

The Frisco Independent School District is a growing school district located north of Dallas, TX. They serve more than 60,000 students across elementary, middle, and high school, and utilize a student opportunities model that has guided them through three decades of explosive enrollment growth. Frisco ISD currently partners with EVERFI to provide their students with population-level education on the topics of mental health education, character education, and anti-bullying education as part of their broader curriculum strategy.

In exploring Frisco ISD's EVERFI course data, EVERFI researchers observed that their students endorsed significantly higher rates of pro-social behavior including healthy attitudes related to mental health, character, and bullying, as well as significantly higher rates of student perceptions that they were a part of a community that cares about them. The following case study is presented to highlight their efforts and gain a deeper understanding of the systemic strategies that they are utilizing to support student well-being.

In pre- to post- course survey responses, Frisco ISD saw increases that were at least double the national average on mental health and character building questions.

### Mental Health



I feel confident that I know how to find help for my own mental health needs.

*Pre- to post- course change*

National	Frisco ISD
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+12	<b>+32</b>
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I feel confident that I know how to help someone else in need.

+13	<b>+32</b>
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I know what puts my mental health at risk.

+11	<b>+20</b>
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I can recognize when I need to use coping strategies to protect my mental health.

+13	<b>+23</b>
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*National n-size=22,626 ; Frisco ISD n-size= 40*

### Character Education



I am good at identifying and labeling my emotions.

*Pre- to post- course change*

National	Frisco ISD
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+2	<b>+6</b>
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I feel prepared to deal with conflicts and communication in a healthy way.

+3	<b>+6</b>
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I stop to think about why I am feeling a certain emotion before I act.

+6	<b>+14</b>
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*National n-size=19,224 ; Frisco ISD n-size= 405*

Students in Frisco ISD endorse significantly higher than average pro-social behaviors when it comes to bullying prevention. Students surveyed in Frisco were much more likely than peers nationally to say they feel responsible for preventing bullying at their school and that they are likely to ask a trusted adult for help to deal with bullying.

### Bullying Prevention



It is my responsibility to prevent bullying at my school.

*Pre- to post- course change*

National	Frisco ISD
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+58	<b>+76</b>
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I know how to play a positive role in my school community.

+82	<b>+92</b>
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I am likely to ask a trusted adult for help dealing with bullying.

+69	<b>+76</b>
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*National n-size =21,220 ; Frisco ISD n-size= 113*

# A Collaborative Focus on Programming

*Programming is one of the elements of a curriculum strategy that is most familiar and which most educational systems already have in place in some form. Programming allows a school system to broadly and efficiently disseminate critical information in a consistent manner regarding core concepts, critical skills, laws and policies, and available resources.*



**Scalable, multimodal, and targeted delivery of impactful training and education**

EVERFI has been a part of Frisco's character and resiliency strategy since 2016, when they embedded Character Playbook within their health class curriculum. Since then, Frisco has continued to align their programming with broader institutional efforts. Within elementary schools, they feature a character trait of the month calendar, which builds upon a different character trait every month, and allows them to center their elementary awards around those traits instead of academics. They have also created a mechanism within their secondary schools that utilizes student ambassadors in collaboration with counselors and assistant principals. Together, the trios discuss student challenges and strategies for addressing them-- including curricular infusion, creating issue-specific posters and visible resources. They also utilize their advisory periods in a strategic and synergistic way by using them as opportunities for just-in-time trainings on topics as they come up. For example, if a campus encounters issues with academic integrity, the advisory period can become a holding space for a lesson that covers the topic.

Additionally, Frisco ISD features select lessons for their staff which take place during staff meetings. The lessons often work in alignment with the character trait of the month, and provide a professional development training for staff in the themes that are also being taught to students. Created in-house, they are facilitated on campus each school's counselors and assistant principals to provide educators with timely and pertinent trainings on the topics that are most impactful to students. Frisco also utilizes a data-informed approach to program development. Programs are developed using feedback data from students, and are aligned with the other objectives of focus, highlight throughout this document.

## Key Programing Highlights

- In-house created character & resiliency lessons held during staff meetings
- Data-informed approach to program development
- "Make Your Move" program focuses on character traits
- Student awards focus on character rather than academics
- Staff/student pairings work together to create relevant and timely student programs on critical topics

# Policy: More than Just Checking a Box

*Out of necessity for compliance with federal, local, and national mandates, many school districts adhere to specific policies designed to improve the safety and well-being of their student populations. Often, programming is used to bring these written policies to life, ensuring understanding through classroom lessons or ongoing school or district-wide efforts. Programming also provides a vehicle for additional, repeated communication about policy to ensure that all students and staff understand the expectations of their community.*

## POLICY

### Accountability around state/federal laws and codes of conduct in schools and organizations

Recognizing the importance of both policy compliance and impacts of policy on student safety and well-being, Frisco ISD has worked to make their policies come to life in a variety of ways. When a new policy is introduced, they rely upon peer-to-peer training to educate staff thoroughly. This involves training a counselor/administrator pair from a school on the new policy, and having them lead a session for their peers about the topic. They have found that this approach improves buy-in about the policy as it comes from a relatable source, which contributes to a richer integration and acceptance among staff members.

Additionally, Frisco ISD ensures that their staff members-- particularly those working in character and resiliency -- stay on top of legislation and mandates related to their respective areas of expertise. All of their curriculum directors are tasked with staying connected to the field and staying ahead of any proposed legislation.

### Key Policy Highlights

- Peer-to-peer training to ensure policy awareness and buy-in among staff members
- Prioritization of professional development to ensure staff stay on top of emerging or pending legislative mandates
- Integration of policy directives into classroom lessons and ongoing programmatic efforts

# Using Data to Drive Change

*To be effective, policies and programming cannot be developed and implemented in a vacuum. Best-guesses or past experiences alone are an insufficient basis on which to inform their design, contents, and delivery. Rather, curriculum work should be developed through rigorous intentionality and robust planning--and be continuously informed by current community data.*

## CRITICAL PROCESSES

## Strategic planning, research and data, communication and collaboration

EVERFI course data can play a pivotal role in informing a school's ongoing efforts as it **provides benchmarking data related to student attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about a variety of character and resiliency topics**. Educators and school districts can use these data insights to inform their ongoing strategic planning processes.

Frisco ISD is utilizing critical processes - data and the utilization of data to inform efforts - in a variety of ways. Student feedback is an integral part of this process. Frisco uses student feedback to tailor ongoing efforts around topics that students notice need special attention, and create advisory lessons around it. This involves the collection of both formal and informal data and using it in a timely and responsive way to meet the needs of their community members. Student ambassadors are utilized to help inform administrators of potential challenges so that they can be swift in their responsiveness to them.

Additionally, educators are empowered to collect data in a variety of ways, including informal opportunities to check in with students. For instance, elementary physical education teachers have indicators in their classroom to check in on where students are with character traits to show growth. Students are able to see this when entering or leaving the class, allowing for a constant data collection and tracking process. They also utilize a variety of data collection processes, including their Safe Schools survey, the STOPit app for anonymous incident reporting and bullying prevention, and EVERFI course data to understand the needs of their community members and tailor efforts accordingly.

## Key Critical Processes Highlights

- Formal and informal student feedback used to tailor programmatic efforts
- Informal data collection integrated into the classroom experience
- Sharing of student data as part of the program development process

# Making Character and Resiliency Education a Top-Down & Bottom-Up Priority

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## INSTITUTIONALIZATION

### Adequate resources and widespread commitment to address an issue

One of the primary components of Frisco ISD's success has been their top-down commitment to character and resiliency education. Investment in student well-being is a topic that has been prioritized among the district's senior leaders, which has resulted in an expectation of the same prioritization woven throughout the entire school community. With support from leaders at the highest levels of the district, Frisco ISD is working on directives to integrate this across the curriculum using a Whole Child approach. The message sent by leaders and staff is consistent, and echoes the notion that Whole Child learning is important to their overall mission as educators.

One way in which this has manifested is in the formalization of small group advisory cohorts that move with students throughout their educational journey at the high school level. This form of institutionalization has allowed students to experience a sense of bonding with one another, as well as with student support staff. These strong bonds have led to an increased ability on the part of staff to be able to support students in times of need, and an increase in students comfort level in reaching out.

The district has also ensured that each educator has time carved out of their schedule to focus on these topics and the planning that needs to take place around them. Taking this a step further, at the center of many of their efforts has been their Curriculum and Instruction team. This team works with administrators, counselors, and fellow educators to best explore ways in which to weave character and resiliency topics into classroom lessons-- for instance, finding ways to embed discussions about character education into civil rights lessons, or essays about mental health into an english class.

### Key Institutionalization Highlights

- Adoption of a "Whole Child" approach to education
- Involvement of Curriculum and Instruction team in efforts to explore methods for curricular integration
- Buy-in, communication, and support from district's senior leadership on the prioritization of character and resiliency efforts
- Formalization of small student cohorts that work with the same educators and support staff throughout their educational experience

**As evidenced by the work being done at Frisco ISD, character and resiliency education is more than just a lesson or set of learning standards. Developing a comprehensive strategy to address student health, wellness, and safety challenges is not an easy process, and it requires a shifting of focus from response-based approaches to more upstream initiatives. But, as evidenced by the work being done within the Frisco Independent School District, if schools and school districts truly want to educate the whole child—and reap the rewards of a healthy, thriving community—they need a robust, coordinated plan that focuses holistically on student well-being. By prioritizing student wellness alongside academic success, schools and districts will be able to benefit from the proven merits of both.**

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