



## News Coverage

Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts  
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### [Greenfield Community College hosts Safe and Healthy School Summit](#)

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GREENFIELD — Educators from more than 24 schools and districts gathered at Greenfield Community College Wednesday morning as keynote speaker Gaelin Elmore, a former NFL player, spoke of his tumultuous childhood and how community leaders can assist youth who have experienced trauma.

Elmore, who spent more than 10 years in the foster care system, experienced homelessness and was abused as a child, told his story at the 10th Safe and Healthy School Summit, hosted this by the Office of Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan and the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Franklin County/North Quabbin and Hampshire County.

This year’s summit explored the ways in which adverse childhood experiences and trauma shape school communities.

“The kids that you’re serving, the ones that are impacted by trauma, they don’t owe you anything. They don’t owe you respect, they don’t owe you trust,” Elmore said. “The reason they don’t owe you anything is because someone, at some point, took advantage of that respect and that trust.”

Walking the crowd through his experiences as a foster child, he made note of the various adults he came across — from his abuser, to a football coach that took him under his wing when his father was arrested in 2012 — arguing that the ultimate goal for those serving youth is to instill a sense of belonging in them.

Building trust with kids who have faced trauma and adversity, Elmore argued, must be done by showing compassion, authenticity, resilience and empowerment, shortened with his acronym “CARE.” He emphasized that some children might reject offers for help out of a lack of trust for adults, but that trust is built with patience and consistency.

“CARE is an acronym that I share anywhere I get the chance, it’s the four commitments that anyone can make to be the difference between potential and circumstance,” Elmore said. “It’s ways that people in my life, from four years old until eighteen in my adolescence, came alongside me and lifted me up at the moment where I didn’t think I could go anywhere.”

The summit also featured a six-person panel of educational leaders who discussed the challenges associated with moderating a healthy school climate and the role of school resource officers (SROs) in supporting students who have faced adversity. The event also featured a youth panel with students from Amherst Regional High School in the afternoon.

Moderated by Donald Casella, an educational consultant from teamTMS, the morning panel included Belchertown Public Schools Superintendent Brian Cameron, Greenfield Public Schools Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Stephen Sullivan, as well as Mohawk Trail and

Hawlemont Regional Schools Superintendent Sheryl Stanton. Rhonda Soto, a consultant with Envisioning Unity Inspiring Change, and Mass Mentoring Partnership Chief Program Officer Beth Fraster, also participated on the panel.

“Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont is a rural district, if you don’t know, we are 250 square miles, and we have between 50% and 60% socio-economically disadvantaged students and families in our districts, which means that we have a significant cohort of students that do need additional support,” Stanton said. “If Covid has taught us anything, it’s that trauma does not affect only students with socioeconomic disadvantaged backgrounds. We’re casting a much wider net right now to make sure that we’re capturing all of our students who are struggling.”

Discussing the role of SROs in overall student well-being, many of the panelists mentioned their importance with students’ ability to build trusting relationships with law enforcement, a topic at the center of debate in Greenfield, where School Committee members voted 5-2 against the option to consider stationing an SRO in the district earlier this month.

Sullivan said that whether an SRO would benefit students largely depends on their role within the school and the memorandum of understanding signed between a community’s police force and school district.

“If you don’t have that shared understanding between the school and the police department and the community, it’s just going to be more challenging. If you think an SRO is going to be in your building to address vaping and cell phones and things like that, then you’re probably not starting off in the right place,” Sullivan said. “If you’re thinking about an SRO as a resource, both to connect students and families to resources in the community, to build relationships with students, I think there’s potential to afford it in a positive way.”

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