



Pathways in Education

Removing Roadblocks with Relationships

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My family was not prepared for what we experienced when my second daughter started high school. She was earning good grades—but she wasn't earning credit.

She had thrived in elementary and middle school, but shortly after starting ninth grade, she simply stopped getting out of bed in the morning. Although her grades were passing, her absences kept her from earning class credit.

Unfortunately, her story isn't unique.

A one-size-fits-all educational system can't meet the needs of every student. Each one walks into the classroom with a unique background and personal challenges—if they walk into the classroom at all.

One Treasure Valley charter school is dedicated to meeting those students where they are. Pathways in Education (PIE) seeks to remove roadblocks to success so every student has the chance to graduate. But what makes Pathways in Education different?

My husband and I spent nearly two years trying to understand what our daughter was going through and how to best help her. We tried letting natural consequences play out. We tried online schools. Any improvements we saw were short-term and fleeting. Eventually she was diagnosed with cyclothymia and ADHD.

We now had labels for her struggles—but not a solution.

Around this same time, we were introduced to Pathways in Education. Their model looked almost too good to be true: flexible scheduling, individualized learning, and teachers who saw students before they saw reputations and transcripts.

That's when we found hope again in her high school journey.

I recently spent an hour with Michael Stumph, principal of Pathways in Education's two Treasure Valley locations, and Leslie Lehnertz, Pathways in Education's director of schools in Idaho.

"The first time I walked in and saw the kids and the environment, it just made sense to me," said Stumph. "We really take care of the group of kids that get overlooked. For me, it's a passion project."

Students enroll at Pathways for various reasons. Some are there to graduate early and move on to the next chapter of their lives. But most come because circumstances beyond the classroom have become barriers to learning.

Earning a diploma matters, of course. But Lehnertz and Stumph made it clear that students rarely overcome those barriers until they know someone has their back.

"There seems to be a catalyst for why it didn't work out at their other schools," Stumph said, listing reasons such as bullying, pregnancy, homelessness, divorce, or trouble with the law.



That was a dream she had written off for herself.

Watching my daughter cross the graduation stage on her own terms, I couldn't help wondering how many students slip through the cracks each year—not because they lack intelligence or potential, but because they need someone willing to remove the roadblocks they cannot overcome alone.

For many Treasure Valley families, Pathways in Education has become that place.

"We love kids until they love themselves," Lehnertz said.

"If students don't believe in themselves, education isn't going to hit. They have to know that they're worthy of it."

To learn more about Pathways in Education in Idaho, please visit id.pathwaysineducation.org. 

Lehnertz elaborated, "One of the misconceptions is that we get all the bad kids, which is not true. We have very few discipline problems each year."

"We have kids from every walk of life who are at risk, and for varying reasons. Something has happened that stagnated them in some way. They need a change. They need something different."

Stumph said that the key to Pathways' success is relationships. "Without the strong relationships and love, all the way through all the staff, we would be really unsuccessful."

In a recent survey, Pathways asked students a fill-in-the-blank question: How many trusted adults do they have in their school building?

"The average answer was ten," he said. "That means everything to me. Because with those strong relationships, the kids can be successful."

Stumph said that removing roadblocks requires a unique

approach for every student. "Every kid faces different roadblocks every single day. Maybe I need to feed them, or maybe I come in early to let them take a test at 7 a.m. because they took a second job to support their family. We do whatever it takes—it does not matter."

"We have the ultimate goal of getting them across the finish line," Lehnertz said, "figuring out how they learn best so they can be successful."

"When Mike and I hire people, we hire for heart. Teaching skills can be taught, but the heart cannot. If you don't have a heart for kids, Pathways is a tough place to work. You have to love them, and it's a lot emotionally for the teachers and administration. But we make an impact every single day."

My daughter spent her junior year at Pathways rebuilding her confidence. With the support, encouragement, and love of her teachers, she caught up on every school credit. She completed her senior year at our local high school and, in the spring of 2026, graduated with the rest of her class.

