

## A Note from the Executive Director



What another great year it's been! It's an understatement to say that we've been busy here at Education Elevators.

In Kanawha County, Flaherty Sensabaugh Bonasso joined as a new business partner. We are also working with the CHANCE Program to identify students in need of Elevators. (The CHANCE Program is an 8 week program through KCS that provides students who need additional support with coping strategies, mental health treatment, and family support). In Berkeley County, we launched a new partnership with WVU Medicine and brought on a new program coordinator to support our growth. We also launched in Putnam County with a partnership between Toyota Manufacturing and Buffalo Elementary. We will be working with Communities in Schools on that initiative.

All of this brings me great joy because of the enormous need for Elevators. In Berkeley County, almost HALF of the students are of low socioeconomic status. At Buffalo Elementary, they currently do not have any mentors despite the multitude of challenges kids face. Many students in our program experience food insecurity, homelessness, and exposure to violence and substance abuse in the home. One little girl said that her mother slept all day long with a needle sticking out of her toe. These challenges adversely affect academic performance, attendance, mental health, and overall well-being.

While Elevators cannot change the issues impacting students, they can positively impact student achievement, performance, attendance, sense of future, and overall happiness. As Allison Espling, a teacher at Ruffner said, "Students who's light felt dimmed or those who may not have a chance to feel important or loved are given a chance to shine." With all these new partners, Education Elevators will offer more kids the opportunity to shine.

Elevators make a direct current and future impact on the lives of students throughout WV. I hope you will continue to support these incredible relationships.

Allison McJunkin

Students who's light felt dimmed or those who may not have a chance to feel important or loved are given a chance to shine.

-Allison Espling, Teacher

## PARTNER PROFILE - FIRST CHOICE SERVICES



Lata Menon with her student Jose

**Why We Partner:** FCS operates several programs and helplines across six states with the common goal of promoting wellbeing and facilitating access to behavioral health and social services. Most of our senior staff started out on the front line providing direct services. In those positions, you can feel the difference you make everyday. Now that many of us are in administrative positions, we don't get a chance to provide much direct service. Education Elevators was a great fit for our team as it lets us get out and give back. It's especially nice to connect with kids right here in our community. When we heard about the program from a tenured Elevator, it was a no-brainer for us to get involved!

The partnership has had so many positive impacts. Our Elevators look forward to seeing their kiddos each week. We are actually convinced that we get more out of it than our kids. It's not uncommon to overhear our Elevators in the hall talking excitedly about things they plan to do with their kids on their next visit. In the middle of a long day, a half-hour visit with a child is a great opportunity to reconnect and refocus priorities. The kids are always excited to see us, too. They have the undivided attention of an adult who is simply happy to see and spend time with them.

**Elevators' Perspective:** Now that my own kids are grown, I miss engaging with children. When you are raising children, it can be quite stressful, juggling responsibilities and making hard decisions. This is different, much more fun!

-Lata Menon, CEO & Elevator

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## Here are some of our incredible new pairs!



The past 2 years have changed Colton drastically in the most positive ways! Colton always has the most positive attitude when it's "David Day" and tells everyone he sees that he gets to see David today!

The relationship between Colton and David is absolutely amazing! - Stacey Beane, School Counselor

## Teacher Perspective

The Education Elevators program has given the students at Ruffner a calm and safe space for a short amount of time in their busy and chaotic lives. The program has allowed students to create a friendship with a positive role model. Students are given a chance to express their emotions, practice social skills, and be themselves with an adult that cares and supports their choices or helps guide them in the best way possible. The Education Elevator's visits give the Ruffner students a chance to be heard and seen, which they may not have at home. They're eager to come to school. They know for that day, the day they get to see their Elevator, they're loved and important.



Students who's light felt dimmed or those who may not have a chance to feel important or loved are given a chance to shine. Most of these students are surrounded by negative role models, defeating words, or bear the weight of responsibilities that are much too heavy for a child to handle. Students benefit from this program because they're given a chance to be a kid with a positive adult who is going to ask them how they are, ask them their interests, and give them the attention they desperately deserve and may not experience quite often in their lives. They get an opportunity to have a guide in their life to help them with academics, goals, and hardships.

I have noticed drastic changes in Colton since he started to meet with David. Each day Colton mentions David at least once and expresses how excited he is to see him the following week. When it is 'David Day', Colton walks in eagerly and spends the day with the biggest smile on his face because he's looking forward to their time together. Colton wears his heart on his sleeve, so any emotion he is experiencing he will communicate it very openly. Days spent with David always result in the biggest smile and an upbeat attitude for the remainder of the day.

-Allison Epling, Teacher, Ruffner Elementary

## School Counselor Perspective

The Education Elevators program has impacted many students and staff at Ruffner, even students that do not have Elevators. Over the past 2 years, our Elevators and other FCS employees have read to our classes, volunteered during school or after school activities, donated items for classrooms and fundraisers and sponsored many students for our Angel Tree type program.

I have noticed many positive changes in our students who have an Elevator. The Elevators provide an outlet for students who may not have a positive role model at home or are going through a lot of things that many of us could not even imagine. Behavior problems in students have decreased drastically because of these positive interactions. I witnessed a student, who doesn't smile very much, get called into the office to learn that he was being matched with an Elevator. When he arrived, he said, "I know what this is!" and a huge smile came across his face! We are so grateful for our Elevators and FCS!

-Stacey Beane, School Counselor

## Elevator Spotlight

### How would you describe Colton?

He's a smart energetic kid that is always smiling and happy.

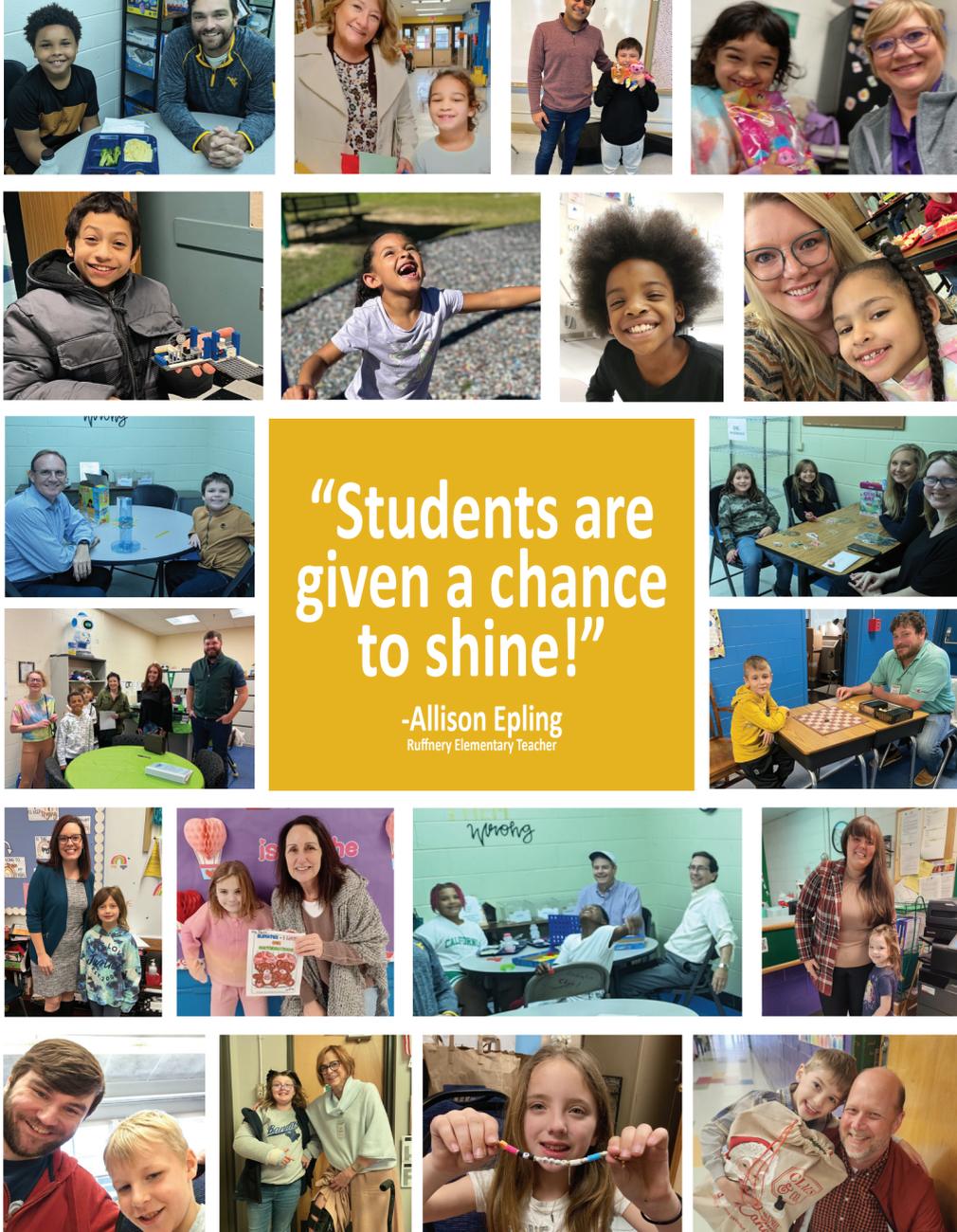
**What do you enjoy most about your time with Colton?** I just enjoy spending time with him. I especially enjoy that he seems genuinely happy to see me (always). We love to play checkers.

**Have you noticed any changes in Colton since you have started meeting with him?** His grandpa passed away this year and he was a little down for a few weeks, but he handled it very well. I have noticed that he seems to be able to focus more on things that we do compared to the prior year. Also, since spending time with Colton our conversations have become more meaningful and longer.

**What do you like best about being an Elevator?** Just being able to brighten someone's day, and in return it brings a joy to me as well.



David Sheppard with student Colton



"Students are given a chance to shine!"

-Allison Epling  
Ruffner Elementary Teacher



Congratulations to Wesley Baker, the Thomas McJunkin Shooting Star Award Recipient this year!



## Students at Malden Elementary Celebrated the End of the School Year with a Pizza Party with their Elevators!



We need your support to help students take flight! Your financial contributions are critical to our program. Please visit our website at [www.educationelevators.org](http://www.educationelevators.org) to learn more, donate, and stay connected with us.

### Education Elevators

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