

*This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast "Gildersleeve's Story: One School's Experience with I'm Determined."*

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]**

Lee Anne **SULZBERGER**: I am sitting with Georgia Lay and talking with her about I'm Determined Virginia and trying to learn a little bit more about Gildersleeve Middle School. Georgia, talk to me a little bit about how you guys decided to implement I'm Determined in your school.

Georgia **LAY**: Back in October Dwana Cooper, our lead special ed coordinator, received a flier about the I'm Determined convention up in Staunton, and she put together a team and she asked if I'd represent the general ed, and I said, "Fine." And so we went to Staunton and it was wonderful! That two days was the best conference I'd ever been to. It energized us and, and before we even left there we started a plan. So we got back to school, and I started working with my enrichment class, my SOL, which had a mixture of regular ed, some special ed who were on the higher end of the special ed, and some discipline problems, and we started working on the three, uh, forms: the goals, the one-pager, and what makes a good day. And I did it a little bit backwards. We set the goals first. We did two. We did a long term goal and a short term for success.

**SULZBERGER**: Oh, neat.

**LAY**: and then we changed the short term to another short term. About the first nine weeks we were doing little more short term. Then we did what makes a good day (**SULZBERGER**: Excellent) to go with our goals, and then finally the One-Pager. And so we put them all over the board so we could refer to it, and I saw them every other day. And for the first two or three weeks we really hit hard and heavy going with the plan. Then I started bringing in my other classes--my other three classes with special ed children, and I started picking two or three of 'em to work with that were struggling a little bit, and I would work with them during the first ten minutes of my social studies class when the others were doing the warm ups and the home (**SULZBERGER**: Oh, neat.) work.

**LAY**: I started working with them and we got their goals. When we started doing their IEPs they came into their IEPs for the first time and got (**SULZBERGER**: Fantastic!) involved in saying what they really needed, and in my SOL class they all made the honor roll for the third nine weeks.

**SULZBERGER**: Fantastic!

**LAY**: The second and the third nine weeks I should say. And that's where it got to the point I didn't have to work with them any longer all I had to say was, "Are you having a good day? What's making your good day?" And now that they're involved in their IEPs they're going to say, "I know I'll be in seventh grade next year, but I'm gonna be in those meetings. I wanna be part of this. I know what I need."

**SULZBERGER**: What's been the reaction of teachers to I'm Determined? Have you...

**LAY**: My team, and I've got to admit, my uh, the team that I really started this program in, has bought into this. The English teacher uses some of the formats along with the AVID. The math teacher has done it.

**SULZBERGER**: For all students?

**LAY**: For all students.

**SULZBERGER**: Oh, wow!

**LAY**: The rest of my team has been great. I've seen other teams using some parts of it (**SULZBERGER**: mmm hmm) they take parts of it, and it's working pretty well. And some of the kids'll say, "Well, I wanna do this, too," So as our kids are talking about it, the other teams want to do it also. And, and I'll say, "Ok, all you gotta do is

'What makes a good day for you?' and if you see that something's not happening with the Good Day, think back. Go to your happy place and think back."

**SULZBERGER:** What advice would give some of these other teams that are looking at implementing it, or trying it, based on what your team and you guys have learned for this year?,

**LAY:** Go to the web site. Look at the information that they've got. I said, "They've got lesson plans for you." I told her, I said, "You need to try it. Just give 'em short goals and let 'em be vocal in their, their learning. Let them own. 'Cause once we started letting the children own their learning, we started seeing caring, and that's-- I-I think the biggest choice. And, and you know--I have to say with using the I'm Determined, my scores for the, with the special ed--75% of those kids passed the SOL in in January.

**SULZBERGER:** That's fabulous!

**LAY:** And, it had to be because of having, instead of "You're talking, you're disciplined, get out of my room" finding out what was going on with them. It could have been because mom and dad was in a fight. They're going, you know, they're gonna losing (sic) the house. You understood that because that's what their, their One-Pager said.

**SULZBERGER:** What, um, what did you appreciate as a teacher knowing about your students? Like, how did it impact you? Um, you'd said that interacting with them you kind of knew their stories.

**LAY:** Knowing in writing what the child wants, I think was the most. Not what they needed so much, it's what they wanted us to do for them. Like they wanted a set of notes because they couldn't read so well. Or they wanted more activities so they could learn by doing. By knowing that on that One-Pager, I knew this child needed a set of notes, or I knew he needed illustrations to share the point, or I knew he needed to get up and move so he wouldn't get discipline trouble. By them starting to own up and say, "I really want and need this to help me succeed."

**SULZBERGER:** Was it pretty easy for the students to identify, you know, their strengths, their preferences (LAY: Umm) or do you work with them?

**LAY:** It took, it took a little while. We, we showed a lot of the videos (**SULZBERGER:** Uh, huh) from the website about them doing the One-Pagers and the other activities that's on there. To make you an A/B student, what do you really need? Is it coming to school every day? All right, I'll call you at six o'clock every morning. Is it getting you here after school with me? I'll take you home. What do you actually wa-- need? And then we went, "What do actually want us to do for you?"

**SULZBERGER:** So what, I know you're, you're retiring, what are your wishes for I'm Determined at Gildersleeve?

**LAY:** To be one hundred percent. The children who don't care, really do care, and I think if we, we take it to them and say, "Hey, I know we're responsible to teach you, but you're responsible, so what's gonna help to make you learn. Is it cutting down your homework because there is no one? Is it giving you a study period? And, and...just not special ed, include everybody. And I think if, if the school bought into it one hundred percent, just not us special ed teachers, but everybody buys into it, I think we'll see higher test records. I think we'll see kids who want to continue into school. I've got kids who, who told me they hated school in September and now they're saying, "Can't I stay with you the rest of the year?" It's how they perceive themselves. I think when they, they get that-- perceive that "I can do" then they do. You came in here with 56 discipline records, and you've had one this year. That shows me growth. And then they're proud about that. It's just the little things, and that's what the I'm Determined starts with little things, and then it builds 'em up, and then you've got

a student for life. One little program, two weeks' worth of work and all the rest of the year those kids (SULZBERGER: What a lot of pay back for it) speak to me.

**LAY:** Yes!

**SULZBERGER:** How neat.

**LAY:** And, and I see their growth. I mean, they're now talking to us in the hallway, and they're giggling and laughing with me.

**SULZBERGER:** So they're interacting and (LAY: They're...) speaking up (LAY: Yes!) for themselves and really being an active part of their (LAY: Yes!) school, which makes them like it better.

**LAY:** That's it. And, and we've had 'em in their IEP meetings. They're talking what they want. What can we do to help you in high school? They're already making plans for high school.

**SULZBERGER:** That's great. I am so delighted that I (LAY: laugh) got to sit down and talk with you about... I really appreciate your enthusiasm and kind of just sharing. (LAY: Ah) You've painted such a good picture of what it looks like at Gildersleeve from a teacher's perspective.

**LAY:** Of, of all of the programs this has been the most beneficial one, and when I get frustrated I look at my chart right there and think these kids are frustrated, too. Let's step back and see what we can do. And it has given me a new lease for teaching.

**SULZBERGER:** So what do you think it is about I'm Determined that makes it so successful?

**LAY:** I think it's because the kids have bought into it. They're not told "This is what you're going to do." We're saying to them, "It's you and I, but 50/50. It's you and I. Now, what can I do to help you? What can you do? It's opening up and what do you wanna do? And that's what I'm Determined does. It lets 'em dream, and it doesn't say to you, "You can't do."

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]**