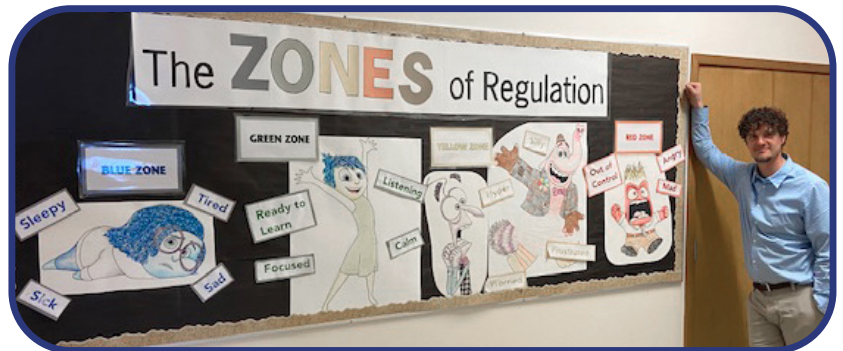




# — Ponderosa Elementary School — Shifting School Climate Using Common Language

BILLINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MONTANA

Ponderosa Elementary is a thriving school community of 274 students in Montana's Billings Public School District, a collaborative partner of The Zones of Regulation. Ponderosa is a Title 1 school with 100% of students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch and 47% identifying as students of color, predominantly Hispanic and Native American. Ponderosa's School Counselor, Chad Jackson, has been at the school for 11 years and was recently named Montana's School Counselor of the Year for 2022. He started using The Zones of Regulation 8 years ago (2013) as a foundation for schoolwide Social Emotional Learning (SEL).



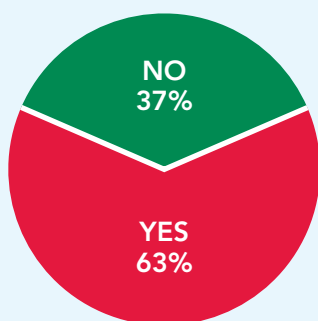
*[The Zones] language helps us speak about the spectrum of emotions in a very relatable way, and promotes understanding among both students and staff.... Students can also advocate for themselves in every classroom using this language that all teachers now understand.*



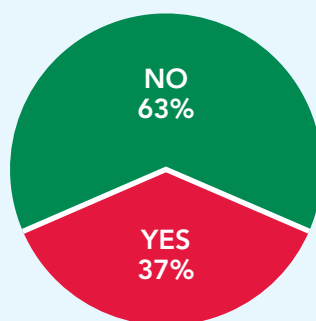
## PERCEPTION OF BULLYING STUDENT SURVEY

*Do you think bullying is a BIG problem at Ponderosa?*

2018 – 2019



2020 – 2021



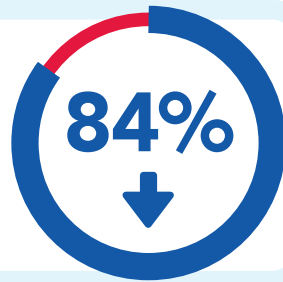
## STUDENT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Mr Jackson and his colleagues at Ponderosa were seeing kids coming to school with so many strengths and assets, but showing challenges in the competencies of self-awareness, self-regulation, and decision making. "For years I was observing students coming in, particularly in kindergarten, without self-regulation, conflict resolution skills and also lacking a basic schema to process emotional information." Staff noticed that students at Ponderosa had a particularly difficult time with regulation during recess and lunch, resulting in a high number of peer conflicts, bullying, and dysregulation that negatively impacted the rest of their learning day. This became increasingly urgent when looking at school behavioral data on peer conflicts and fights at lunch and recess, with 63% of students reporting that they see bullying as a "big problem" at Ponderosa.

## CHOOSING AND IMPLEMENTING THE ZONES OF REGULATION

Mr Jackson describes his initial focus as a School Counselor as building meaningful connections with kids. However, he recognized there wasn't an effective structure or system in place to proactively teach the SEL skills that Ponderosa's learners needed. The story the data told was that students needed to learn basic emotional awareness and self-regulation, which was especially evident in unstructured settings such as recess. He started researching social emotional learning curriculum approaches and The Zones of Regulation stood out. *"I found the Zones and I right away latched onto it. I felt like it educated me as I was going through it. And I was like, Oh, yeah, our kids need this. And this is more true now than it was even 8 years ago."*

**IN 3 YEARS  
BULLYING  
REFERRALS  
DECREASED BY**



As Ponderosa's leader of SEL implementation, Mr Jackson began by diving into The Zones of Regulation curriculum book. He planned a series of lessons to teach in each classroom of the school, adapting the lessons to fit his teaching style and school community. Over time, he created a detailed plan that started with using the common language and practices of The Zones as a foundation for a larger

schoolwide implementation, and then layered in resources and lessons from Kelso's Choice, Second Step, and Social Thinking, organized into a pacing guide for grade level bands. He also created a targeted intervention for supporting SEL on the playground, that included a process for students to walk through to notice their feelings/ Zones, identify the size of the problems they encounter, and regulation tools to help de-escalate situations.

## STAFF BUY-IN AND TRAINING

Once he got his lessons underway, Mr Jackson began to present information on The Zones to the Ponderosa staff in order to familiarize them with concepts, practices, and resources they could integrate into their classroom instruction. Given that Ponderosa has a high staff turnover, having common language and consistent practices has been crucial to building a positive school climate. *"Now, we have an entirely new staff, so the focus is training new teachers when they come in. One of the first things I do is meet with each new teacher, and explain The Zones to them. I provide them with materials and visuals for their classroom, and so now it's much more of a 'come in and learn our culture'. [The Zones] are a part of our culture, and this is how we approach it."*



## COMMON LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES

Teachers at Ponderosa integrate The Zones of Regulation common language (e.g., "Let's check-in with our Zones") into morning meetings, and check-in with students' Zones throughout the day, creating consistent and inclusive support across settings.

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*Teachers all over the building are using the same language to help kids process, which helps them to be more effective in regulating. It also helps to de-escalate things so much quicker when they already have the background knowledge in the language and the understanding... It's been incredibly effective.*

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Every classroom also has a calm space with tools to help students regulate, and Mr Jackson's office serves as a regulation space for students who need more support.

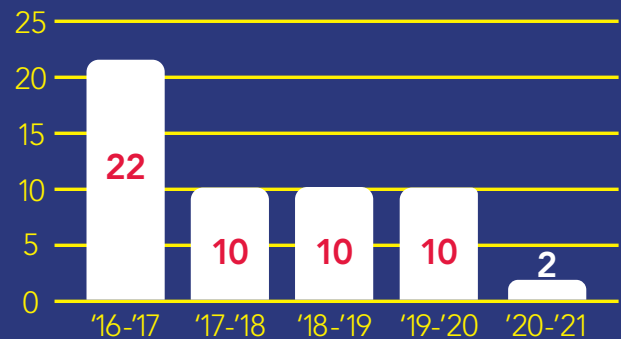
## IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

*"The impact [of The Zones of Regulation] on our students has first and foremost been on their ability to understand emotions and develop skills that help them move toward regulation. Knowledge is power, and this [The Zones] has empowered our students to also process situations and issues so much quicker and more effectively. I believe that it has had [not only] a profound impact on preventing issues [but also] de-escalating issues before they turn into more pervasive issues. A big piece is building up the confidence in them to have the tools, to know that they can handle it, and to know that the teaching staff has their back."*

Ponderosa's schoolwide data backs up their proactive approach to teaching regulation to combat peer conflict and bullying. Student incidents resulting in suspension (either in-school or out-of-school) have decreased by 91% in the last 5 years. Referrals for Harassment, Intimidation, or Bullying (HIB), one of the school's identified challenges, have decreased by 84% in the last 3 years. Additionally, the students of Ponderosa have taken note—a 41% decrease in students reporting that they perceive bullying as a "big problem" at school between the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years. In a 2022 student post-assessment survey on Zones of Regulation lessons, over 70% of students reported that they think these lessons have been important/very important for them.

### SUSPENSIONS & FIGHTS

*These are the incidents recorded over the last five years that resulted in either In School Suspensions or Out of School Suspensions*



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*Kids just have the language to process things. It's so funny when a little Kindergartner comes in and is like Mr. Jackson, 'I'm in the Red Zone. I'm so angry.' They have the words and the knowledge and the background to be able to process through [their feelings] in a very smooth way.*

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## A DISTRICTWIDE INITIATIVE



Over the last few years, the Billings Public Schools (BPS) district-level staff has observed the positive impact of The Zones within schools like Ponderosa, and have embarked on creating a district-wide Zones of Regulation initiative. Amity Burkhardt, Coordinator for The Wellness & Resiliency Project in BPS explains, “Many of our elementary special education teachers, principals, and school counselors told us of the success they had when teaching The Zones language and tools schoolwide. Initially we planned to just use The Zones in all our 22 elementary schools, but then middle school principals requested to be included so they could build on and extend what students had already learned.” In the Fall of 2021, Billings’ entire K-8 teaching staff attended official Zones of Regulation Training, funded by a Project AWARE grant for mental health support. Billings’ K-8 counselors have also been collaborating with The Zones’

schoolwide implementation specialist to create and roll out a district-wide phased implementation plan for The Zones that supports schools at any stage of their implementation journey.