



Explore Academy

Lori Hugen – Principal
Scott Williamson – EBF Superintendent

- A Therapeutic K–8 school that supports the mental health and learning needs of students in a safe, structured environment.
- We prioritize emotional regulation, social growth, and academic success through individualized supports, therapeutic practices and strong family collaboration.
- By fostering regulation and resilience, we help students thrive both in school and beyond.



Explore Academy is a K-8 therapeutic environment that was developed in 2021 and has been serving students for almost 5 years.

School Districts:

Eddyville Blakesburg Fremont - Fiscal Agent

Albia

Centerville

Chariton

Davis County

Fairfield

Moulton Udell

Moravia

Oskaloosa

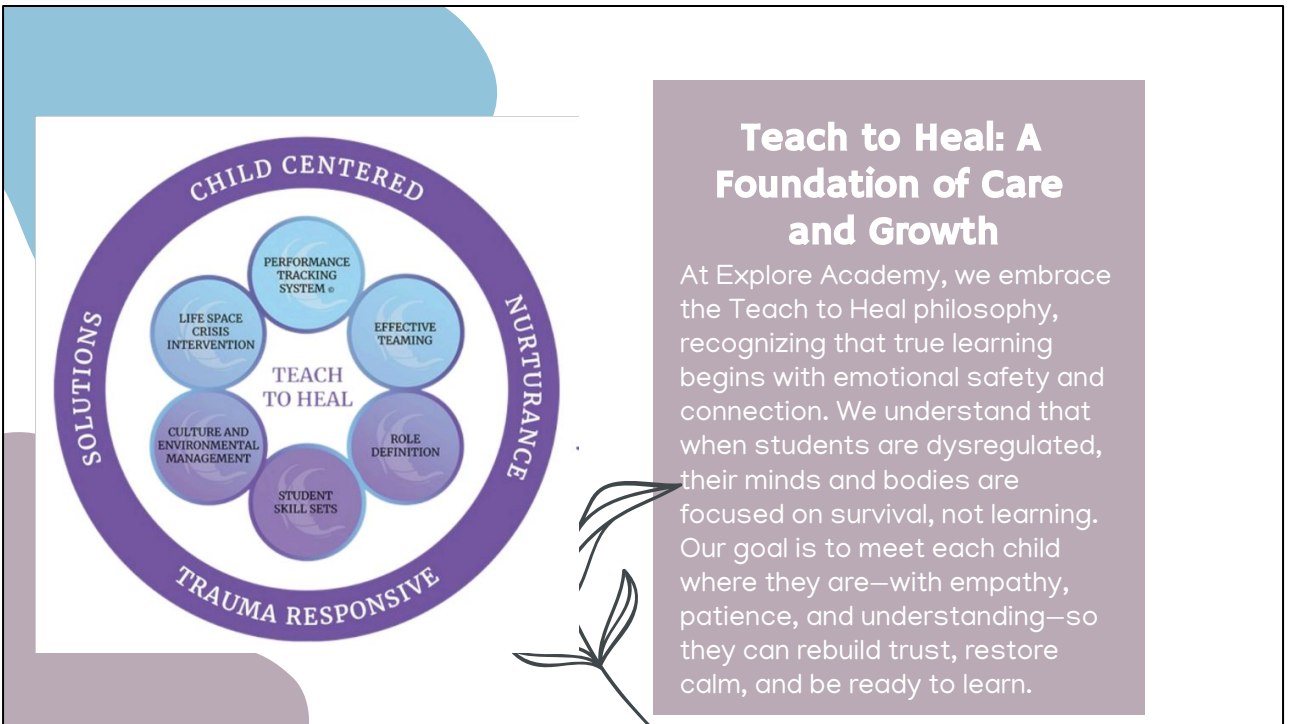
Pekin

Van Buren County

Wayne of Corydon



Our Philosophy



Teach to Heal: A Foundation of Care and Growth

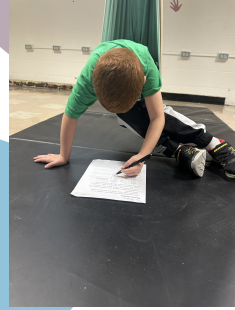
At Explore Academy, we embrace the Teach to Heal philosophy, recognizing that true learning begins with emotional safety and connection. We understand that when students are dysregulated, their minds and bodies are focused on survival, not learning. Our goal is to meet each child where they are—with empathy, patience, and understanding—so they can rebuild trust, restore calm, and be ready to learn.

For the past two and a half years Explore Academy has been participating in Teach to Heal Training. TTH is a Comprehensive approach to supporting mental health needs and Trauma within the educational environment. TTH provides a framework to address mental health and behavioral needs in all levels in the school setting from Tier 1 to the most restrictive setting off-site. The Explore Academy is an off-site setting.

The Teach to Heal framework has provided Explore Academy with the necessary training and tools to meet students exactly where they are!

Healing Before Learning

Every child's story matters. Our team uses trauma-informed practices and compassionate teaching to help students identify emotions, regulate responses, and rebuild trust. Instead of reacting to behaviors, we respond with understanding—because calm, caring support opens the door to growth.



Students are guided through strategies such as mindfulness, self-time, sensory breaks, and co-regulation with trusted adults. These tools empower them to manage emotions and gain control over their own well-being—skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

TTH teach to heal recognizes that a dysregulated brain cannot learn. Our sole purpose is to provide the therapy and safe environment needed for students to understand what it feels like to have a regulated brain and body. This regulation is what opens the door to learning.



Connection Creates Confidence

Strong, authentic relationships are at the heart of everything we do. Through small class sizes, individualized support, and consistent structure, our students feel seen and valued.

Connection builds confidence—and confidence builds curiosity. When students trust their environment, they're more willing to take healthy risks, express their needs, and explore new learning challenges. We believe relationships are not just the key to learning—they are the learning.

True connection is what allows the students to feel seen and validated. When students feel true connection they understand that they do not have to display maladaptive behaviors in order to get their needs met.

Therapeutic Supports

Our multidisciplinary team works together to nurture the whole child. Teachers, therapists, and support staff collaborate to provide a comprehensive framework of care that integrates social, emotional, and academic learning.

Supports may include:

- Individual and group therapy – 30 minutes of each per week.
- Music therapy – 30 minutes per week
- Sensory and movement therapy
- Social skills instruction
- Restorative practices and peer mediation
- Personalized regulation plans

Each child's support plan is tailored to help them build coping skills, emotional awareness, and resilience—while celebrating every small victory along the way.



An area that Explore Academy has been incredibly proud of is the amount of therapy that we are able to offer on site. We serve very rural districts in Southern Iowa. Families of our students are often not able, for a variety of reasons, to get their children the mental health support that they need.

Explore Academy offers 30 minutes of Individual therapy and 30 minutes of group therapy from a certified mental health therapist weekly. Children also receive music therapy from a certified music therapist for 30 minutes per week. This is, at a minimum, 90 minutes weekly for each student.

Students also have a typical schedule with reading, math, science, social studies, and specials (art and physical education).


The typical school schedule is only able to take place when the brain is regulated. When a student begins working through a typical school schedule, including work completion and the ability to attend to their tasks, that is when the EA staff knows that the student is ready to transition back to their previous school.



Our Environment

At Explore Academy, every space is thoughtfully designed to support the full spectrum of student regulation. Our **Regulate & Restore Room** provides a calm environment where students can work one-on-one with our **Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI)-trained Behavior Interventionist** to process emotions and work through moments of crisis. The **Drain Off Room** offers a safe place for students to release energy and emotions in a healthy way, while the **Reset Room** allows them to engage in movement routines, sensory activities, or quiet personal time to regain balance.

Each of these spaces plays a vital role in helping students reconnect, refocus, and return to learning with a clear mind and calm body. Every space encourages choice, autonomy, and comfort—because a student who feels safe can truly focus, connect, and grow.



Providing these types of services that promote true regulation and healing requires several staff, multiple spaces, and a myriad of regulatory items.

At Explore Academy there are three classrooms, and four additional spaces that promote regulation. Each classroom has a teacher, one support staff, and 4-6 students.

Outside of the classroom there are four staff dedicated to providing time to regulate and restore balance, reset routines that engage movement, sensory and quiet time to regain balance, a drain off room that provides a safe place for students to be alone and practice skills identified by teachers and therapists.

Most of EA staff is certified in LSCI, these four staff mentioned in the previous paragraph are not only certified in using the interventions, but continue to receive “refreshers” yearly to keep their skills consistent with student need.

Our Environment

Reset Room



Drain Off



Classroom



SEL



In these environments you will see some of the things that are used for a student to self regulate: art activities, bouncy balls, mini-trampoline. Many other items support regulation in the school also.

Our Results

Academy Explore – Statistics

	Students	Transitions out	Districts in Consortium	Total Referrals	Staff
21/22	11	0	7	19	6
22/23	12	3	8	10	7
23/24	13	2	9	14	7
24/25	14	5	9	11	11
25/26	12	5	12	14	11
Totals	40	15	12	68	11

- 80% of the students that have transitioned back are spending over 75% of their time in the general education setting.
- All students are completing at least 50% of their assigned work.
- Average length of time at Explore Academy is 18 months.

We are very happy with the results that we have seen over the past 5 years.

40 students in over 10 different districts surrounding EBF have received services.

This table illustrates student participation and transitions, the number of school districts in the consortium, and staff.

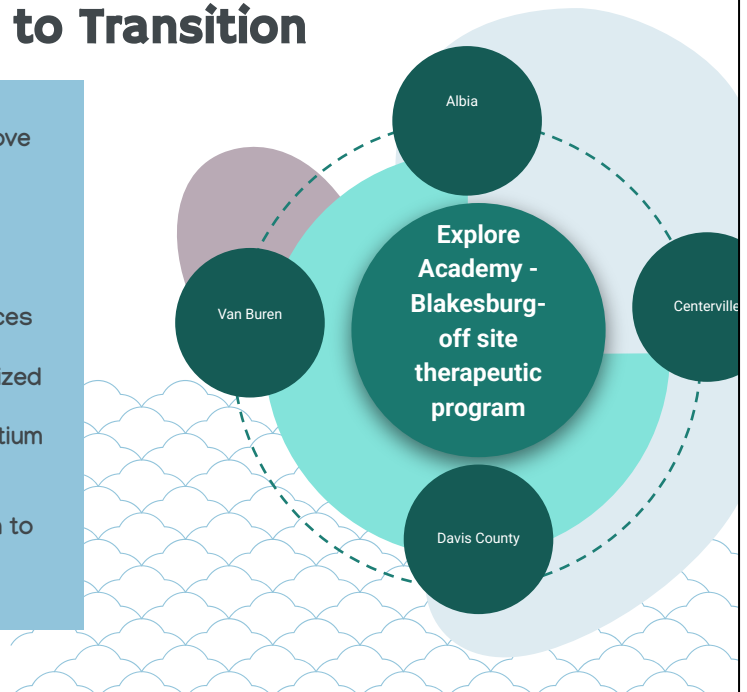
The amount of referrals has remained consistent over the years as well as the number of students that remain on a waiting list.

The transition back to their previous school district has been evolving over the past 5 years. We have learned a lot about how to make this transition successful and continue to implement changes to ensure this success. Data is collected every 6 months regarding the students who have transitioned back.

Data indicates 80% of our students are spending 75% of their time in the general education setting and the students are completing a minimum of 50% of their assigned work.

Key to Transition

- Schools that utilize Teach to Heal allow the students to move from therapeutic classroom within their home district to Explore Academy and back seamlessly.
- Students are able to work through a continuum of services ensuring that the Least Restrictive Environment is utilized to support student need.
- Five out of our twelve consortium schools are engaged in TTH training.
- Allows for Regional Approach to providing comprehensive therapeutic environments in Southern Iowa.



One area contributing to positive transition experiences is the TTH framework. When home school districts utilize the TTH framework, Explore Academy is able transition students back to that environment seamlessly.

Currently five out of our 12 Consortium schools are engaged in Teach to Heal training. We are hopeful that with these schools engaged in TTH, we will be able to offer a regional approach to providing comprehensive therapeutic environments in Southern Iowa.

The diagram shows how this could look. Explore Academy is the off-site program, however, students would go through an on-site program in one of the four districts before being referred to EA and when returning from EA.

Transitions are difficult with more obstacles when students are pushed too quickly into the general education environment. The on-site programming continues to offer the same programming that EA offers, it is in the home school district allowing the students to continue to increase their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) at a pace specific to the student. The student in the home school district functioning with the least amount of a restrictive environment is the final goal.