

Educator draws on experience to help when families fall short

By ANDREA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

In his previous line of work as a drug and alcohol counselor, Carlos Carmona witnessed the downward spiral of addiction.

He knows that an adult's descent into addiction often begins in childhood. And he also knows that a teacher's early intervention can stop problems in their tracks.

So the 35-year-old made a career switch last fall. Now, he keeps a watchful eye on the students at Union Canal and Ebenezer elementary schools as a learning facilitator.

"My primary focus is looking at the social and emotional component of kids," Carmona said of the position that is a combination of school psychologist and counselor. "If a kid feels like they're not part of the community or like they need to fend for themselves, are shy and lack social skills, they're more worried about that. There's not enough men-



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Learning facilitator Carlos Carmona talks to youngsters in Christen DiFabrizio's kindergarten class at Union Canal Elementary School about the importance of listening to each other and how to do it.

tal space for kids to focus on two plus two. There's more obstacles than meets the eye, beyond a child not doing well in math or reading."

As a young student growing up in a rough environment, Carmona said he understands

(COUNSELOR, 4A)

Lebanon and Philadelphia fans jubilate yesterday during victories that leave both teams one win away from an all-Pennsylvania Super Bowl.

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(From 1A)

the major role schools can play in a child's life, or perhaps more important, the supporting role it can play in the lives of parents.

"I'm from the 'Boogie Down Bronx,' where rap was invented," he said. "What got me interested, I came from a very dysfunctional family. ... I come from a welfare family. What kept me from becoming a statistic, what helped me go against the odds, was I had a very caring school environment. I understand education is a major way to transcend family circumstances and obstacles."

Receiving his graduate and undergraduate degrees from Millersville University, Carmona took an internship with the Cornwall-Lebanon School District under the instruction of Jason Pedersen after changing careers as an HIV-and-AIDS counselor and alcohol-and-drug counselor with the Spanish American Civic Association.

What drew Carmona, a Lancaster resident, to Cornwall-Lebanon, he said, is the progressive attitude it takes with the role of a guidance counselor.

As at other schools, the district works with a three-tier system called Response to Intervention, designed to help children who have a difficult time learning, Carmona said. If a child is not progressing with the current instruc-



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tion he is receiving, the child will then receive more intensive instruction on the next "tier." If there is no improvement by the third tier, then the child will be tested to determine if he has a learning disability.

"We also have a proactive approach to the behavioral curriculum," he said.

With large, laminated signs of smiling Ebenezer and Union Canal students and phrases like "show respect" in bold letters, students will get the message in the hallways, cafeteria and classrooms, he said.

As a learning facilitator, Carmona also helps to develop behav-

ioral plans for struggling students, conducts social-skills and anger-management groups, tests students, and consults with parents, teachers and administrators.

"Unfortunately in many communities, there's no place to catch kids early on, aside from school," he said. "We have vigilant eyes. We can be a second pair of eyes for parents and consult them. Schools can be a screen for catching problems early on."

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