

WBCEF Grant - Moslak

Mornings in a classroom can set the tone for the entire school day—and for myself, finding a more purposeful way to begin the day has been a long-time goal. Thanks to a recent classroom grant from the district, I have been able to bring my vision to life: “Soft Starts,” a gentle, engaging way for students to transition into learning.

Rather than starting the day with worksheets or idle waiting time, students now enter a calm, structured environment filled with activities designed to promote creativity, communication, and collaboration. I was able to use the grant funds to purchase materials like building blocks, magnetic tiles, puzzles, games, and play dough—hands-on items that encourage critical thinking and exploration.

I realized that I feel more prepared and effective when I ease into my day. I wanted to give my students the same opportunity—a chance to settle in, connect with classmates, and engage their minds in meaningful ways before we dive into instruction.

This shift in classroom culture addresses a common challenge in many elementary classrooms: the unstructured arrival period. With students arriving over a 25-minute window, mornings were previously marked by restlessness, noise, and disruption. Now, with the help of these new materials and clearly taught expectations, my classroom has become a place of curiosity and calm.

Beyond setting a peaceful tone, soft starts provide rich educational benefits. Students naturally engage in the “4 Cs” of 21st-century learning—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Whether they’re working together on a building challenge or quietly solving a puzzle, students are practicing essential life and career skills in a low-pressure environment.

The initiative also aligns with the Pennsylvania STEELS (Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy & Sustainability) standards, which emphasize exploration, problem-solving, and design thinking. While not a formal STEM block, soft starts give students daily opportunities to invent, test, reflect, and redesign—key components of the engineering mindset.

I ruled out the grant gradually, beginning with conversations about care, respect, and responsibility. We set clear expectations about how to use materials, clean up, and treat each other during this time. It’s not just about the activities—it’s about creating a culture of respect and joy at the start of each day.

The results have been visible from the start: calmer transitions, stronger peer relationships, and a more focused start to learning. Students are excited to get to school to build and create and often show off their creations. With continued support, this soft start initiative is destined to grow into a beloved tradition—and a meaningful way to empower students both socially and academically.













