

James Santaguida. School Social Worker, didn't exactly *plan* to end up at Siembra Leadership Academy where he started as a social work intern and somehow never left. (We think he got too attached. He agrees.) What began as a field placement turned into a full-blown calling, and honestly, Siembra's loss would have been everyone else's loss, so we're keeping him.

Mr. James is fiercely committed to student well-being, resilience, and academic success but don't let the serious job title fool you. He is equally committed to making students (and staff) laugh until their sides hurt, acting completely goofy in the hallways, and proving that the adults around here don't always have it together either. If you've seen him do something ridiculous and wonder, "*Is that... allowed?*" — yes. That's just Mr. James being Mr. James, and it's 100% part of the plan.

His professional roots are in substance use recovery, but working alongside Siembra's kids revealed something he didn't expect: a deep, lasting love for school social work and the students in it. He believes in meeting students exactly where they are — no judgment, no pressure — and helping them see the strengths they already carry but might not notice yet.

Outside of school, Mr. James spends his time with his fiancée and his daughter, two people who have almost certainly also been subjected to his goofiness and love him anyway.

Oh — and he's planning to pursue a Ph.D., because apparently, he enjoys homework. (We support him. We don't fully understand him, but we support him.)

His message to every student is one he means with his whole heart: **there is always hope, and your past does not define your future.** He'll probably find a way to say it while doing something silly — but he means every word.