

Discussion Item

Date: March 2, 2020

Division: Schools and Student Activities

Subject: Update on Student Assistance Counselors, Social Workers and Behavior Intervention Specialists

Background Information:

- This is a follow-up presentation to the update provided in March 2019.
- This is now the second year of implementation for the student assistance counselors, social workers, and behavior intervention specialists.
- In the book “How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character,” Paul Tough articulates the impact of stress, adversity, and trauma on children:
 - “We now know that early stress and adversity can literally get under a child’s skin, where it can cause damage that lasts a lifetime.
 - “The part of the brain most affected by early stress is the prefrontal cortex, which is critical in self-regulatory activities of all kinds, both emotional and cognitive. As a result, children who grow up in stressful environments generally find it harder to concentrate, harder to sit still, harder to rebound from disappointments, and harder to follow directions. And that has a direct effect on their performance in school. When you’re overwhelmed by uncontrollable impulses and distracted by negative feelings, it’s hard to learn the alphabet. And in fact, when kindergarten teachers are surveyed about their students, they say that the biggest problem they face is not children who don’t know their letters and numbers; it is kids who don’t know how to manage their tempers or calm themselves down after a provocation.”
- According to the research group, EAB, “districts across the US are seeing a dramatic rise in disruptive behavior among their youngest students.”
- The following comments are from a recent article titled “Are Schools Ready to Tackle the Mental Health Crisis?”
 - The Child Mind Institute reports that half of all mental illness occurs before the age of 14, and 75 percent by the age of 24—highlighting the urgent need to create systemic approaches to the problem. “One in five students in this country need treatment,” says Dr. David Anderson, senior director of the Institute’s ADHD and Behavior Disorders Center. “We are seeing a real movement to properly and systematically tackle this crisis, because what these students don’t need is a ‘quick fix.
 - The fact that schools have become essentially the de facto mental health system for students may be jarring to many educators, district leaders, and parents. As

important as the task is, many see it as someone else's job. The change in perspective is a formidable culture shift for many communities.

- What makes it a little tougher is the need to change how we see students—specifically, thinking less about a students' belligerent behavior, for example, and more about the reasons for that behavior," says Joe O'Callaghan, the head of Stamford Public Schools social work department in Connecticut.
- But getting there requires training, ongoing professional development, and resources.
- You have to make sure the whole school knows how to support these kids," O'Callaghan says. Sometimes what happens is a student will feel a lot of support and encouragement from a social worker. But then they'll go back into the school and may not receive the same understanding from the teacher, the principal, the security guard, whomever. So in a whole-school program, everybody needs to be relating to and engaging with each other over students who are experiencing difficult things in their lives.

Administrative Consideration:

- In a recent workshop, board members asked for information regarding the definition of trauma.
 - Definition: Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.
 - Examples (but not limited to) are: neglect, abuse, violence, loss, war or other harmful societal event and natural disasters.
 - Additionally, Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example:
 - experiencing violence or abuse
 - witnessing violence in the home or community
 - having a family member attempt or die by suicide
 - Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with:
 - substance misuse
 - mental health problems
 - instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison
- Monya Crow, Director of Guidance and Counseling, and Rebecca Clark, Director of Student Services, will be presenting data and information regarding these positions.
- Through the implementation of positions such as these LISD is taking a proactive approach to supporting schools and teachers as we face the growing numbers of students experiencing trauma, stress, and mental health concerns which impact the ability of students to learn in the classroom.