



Focus on Mental Health

In this issue of *Wisconsin School News*, we examine the important issue of mental health services and access in our schools. Research shows that this is an area of need amongst our students. One in five children experience a significant mental health issue that impairs their functioning. Many of our school districts have taken notice and are providing supports and services for their students.

In Wisconsin, recent initiatives are being supported by grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Department of Public Instruction. The Ashland, Adams-Friendship and Milwaukee school districts, for instance, are taking part in a five-year SAMHSA project called AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education). Among other benefits, the program works to train school staff to recognize students who may be having problems and how to assist those students and refer them to services to get help.

Other school districts have partnered with local community health organizations to bring in licensed counselors and social workers to support students. Two of those districts — Racine Unified and Beloit — are featured in this month's issue.

In addition, state and regional education organizations are focusing more on mental health services. CESA 5 is holding a Mental Health and Behavior Summit Sept. 19-20 in Wisconsin Dells and CESA 11 held its first Mental Health Summit in March, featuring experts in the field as well as the work of several school

districts including Fond du Lac, Menomonie, New Richmond, and St. Croix Falls. We have also heard from several other CESAs about mental health work they are leading in their regions of the state.

The state Legislature is taking notice of the importance of mental health services for students. Last session, the Legislature passed a law to remove some administrative barriers to providing mental health services in schools. In addition, the Senate Education Committee, chaired by state Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), held an informational hearing on mental health in January and the Speaker's Task Force for Urban Education, chaired by Rep. Jessie Rodriguez (R-Franklin), included in its final report a recommendation to explore allowing Medicaid programs to reimburse mental health providers for consultation with parents and school personnel.

I am proud of the work that our schools are doing and I encourage more schools to join in this effort. Mental health issues can be complex but we must find ways to help our students.

As we continue to work on mental health, my hope is that more grants and resources are made available to our schools to support this work. If you have barriers to meeting mental health needs in your schools, let us know. We know hiring and staffing are issues, but we want to know if there are other ways the state can help support mental health initiatives in our schools.

In other WASB work, starting this summer, we are expanding the access to legal and policy updates to all WASB

members by creating a joint Legal and Policy Services Newsletter. This newsletter will be distributed twice a month by email to all members. The newsletter includes notices of and links to the WASB School Employment and Labor Law Review (eReview), Policy Perspectives, New Law updates and other related WASB publications that are accessible to all members as well as other relevant information and notices. If you are not receiving our emails, contact the WASB at info@wasb.org or 877-705-4422.

Additionally, through a partnership with BoardDocs, the WASB is now offering an online policy management platform that allows districts to manage their entire policy cycles online — from draft policies under consideration to active policies and an archive of retired policies. It also allows the district to provide the community with user-friendly electronic access to all of the district's active policies using the district's existing website as a portal. The policy management platform is built into BoardDocs meeting management systems for those districts who are already subscribers. For others, it can be a stand-alone service for managing policies online. For more information or to subscribe, contact the WASB.

We hope these new services make it easier for you, our school leaders, to do the important work of leading your districts to success by supporting all students, whatever their needs may be. ■

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