

## HOPE Note

November 20, 2018

### Health and Wellness in the Workplace

*If you stay determined, the obstacles cannot stop your progress. You will triumph over every mountain.*  
-Lailah Gifty Akita

As the district continues its journey to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all of our students, we must also consider the mental health and well-being of staff providing this support. Mr. Oz Anderson, district business manager, and I have been visiting each of our buildings sharing financial data as it pertains to staff attendance. These conversations have been the most difficult conversations that I have had with staff in my tenure as superintendent. Last school year, we surveyed staff to determine factors that contributed to our attendance trends and the number one response that we received across the district was mental health. You made it abundantly clear that sometimes you just need a mental health day because of the challenges inherent to working in education.

The pressures to raise test scores, address growing mental health needs of students, ensure that students are fed, improve student attendance, and reduce disciplinary infractions all within a culture of growing threats to school safety is enough to make anyone seek a mental health day. This work can be grueling and we understand the myriad demands. However, we need each and every one of you in order to change the lives of children.

I have thought about what we are seeing in our attendance rates across all staff groups, and I asked myself and members of the leadership team: what can we do to inspire staff to take fewer mental health days? How can we impact the learning environment so that both students *and* staff thrive? How can we bring social and emotional learning to staff? If staff need mental health days, why can't we provide these opportunities here at work?

One answer: Mental Health Days **AT** work. Just as we have committed to improving our district for the betterment of students, we must also consider the health and well-being of staff. Therefore, during an early dismissal day in early 2019, we will engage staff in a mental health "day" for staff. So what does this mean? It means that we will offer a menu of options from which staff can select. Options will provide opportunities to learn, interact, meditate, and a host of other wellness activities. I will not be teaching yoga, in case you are wondering. However, this will be the first of a tradition of mental health offerings in the district.

Will we continue to work hard and engage in tough but critical conversations? Absolutely. We will also continue to reflect upon and revise our deployment of SEL, consider lessons learned thus far and seek solutions to address any remaining unmet student needs. But, we will also be purposeful in using our time to invest in *your* mental health in the hopes that you will be better prepared to serve the children that we all love and support. Stay tuned and keep talking to us. We are listening!

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving break!  
Tamara Willis, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

## **Piece of the Puzzle**



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I am elated to recognize our HS staff for the work that are doing to support the social and emotional development of our students. For example, they all pitched in to write individual notes to ensure that every student received a Candy Gram. Members assisted students in running a Share Table at lunch on which students may leave food and others may take food if needed, and some teachers have created Take a Break (TAB) areas to provide students with greater seating choice and a place to take refuge when genuinely needed. The good news is that there are so many staff engaging, I cannot name them all!

I know that great things are happening all across the district, but high school students are rarely given the opportunity to demonstrate their vulnerability. So, I want to recognize those high school staff members who are creating these opportunities for students and making much needed connections.

HS team, thank you for all that you do. We appreciate you!