

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

August 28, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Mental Health Coordinator (FMC-05-06-19-03)

Question

Ms. Dixon asked to have more information on the Mental Health Coordinator specified in the Kirwan Commission and what MCPS is doing in the area of mental health.

Response

The *Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018* required that each Maryland school district appoint a mental health services coordinator. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) designated the coordinator of student health and wellness to serve in this capacity. The mental health services coordinator participates in weekly communications with the Maryland Center for School Safety, along with the school safety coordinator. In addition, the mental health services coordinator attended the annual School Safety Conference in August 2019.

Two important roles of the mental health services coordinator are to ensure that a student who is referred for mental health services obtains the necessary services and to maximize external funding for mental health and wraparound services, as defined by the bill. The mental health services coordinator is a member of the Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee, the Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council, the Overdose Intervention Team, and the Strategic Alignment Work Group. This involves advocating for mental health and substance use services in Montgomery County and collaborating with County partners, including the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD), to provide complementary services that align with each other. MCPS has strong positive relationships with County partner agencies.

Furthermore, the mental health services coordinator actively has been involved with securing external funding for mental health and wraparound services. State grants have been made available as a result of recent legislation (*Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018* and *Start Talking Maryland Act*) and through state agencies (e.g., the Governor's Opioid Operational Command Center). Funds have been secured to enhance training for MCPS staff members in crisis response

and intervention, trauma-informed cognitive behavioral strategies, behavioral threat assessment, and recognizing and supporting students in emotional distress. This last training is especially important in providing non-mental health professionals with an understanding of mental health, destigmatizing the topic of mental health (and suicide), and empowering adults who work with youth with the skills to support students in emotional distress until professional mental health services may be implemented.

In addition to the efforts to enhance student awareness of mental health services and resources, MCPS is raising awareness of mental health concerns. Examples include the following.

- Development of the Be Well 365 initiative so that staff members and the community may collaborate to support students' physical, social, and psychological health and well-being. Key highlights of Be Well 365 include designation of November as MCPS mental health awareness month, holding a Mental Health Fair on November 9, 2019, at Gaithersburg High School and mental health awareness week activities November 11 through 15, 2019. The goals of mental health awareness month and week are to raise awareness of mental health concerns and available resources and to destigmatize mental health and substance use concerns by providing an opportunity for staff, students, and families to engage in ongoing mental health activities and discussions.
- Securing grant funding to support the development of the HOPE Trailer, a collaboration with MCPD to educate adults about the warning signs of adolescent substance use and to provide resources on substance use prevention strategies. The HOPE Trailer is modeled after the HOPE House, a mobile educational tool in Harford County <https://harfordsheriff.org/get-involved/hope4harford/>, and will travel to events and organizations throughout the county to raise awareness about substance use and prevention.
- Securing grant funding to expand the hours of operation for the Montgomery County Youth Textline.
- Collaboration with the Montgomery County Crisis Center and EveryMind to facilitate communication and follow up when MCPS refers students to the Montgomery County Crisis Center.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Ursula A. Hermann, acting associate superintendent for student and family support and engagement, Office of the Chief Academic Officer, at 240-740-5624.

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Copy to:
Executive Staff
Ms. Webb