

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS - HOW OUR JEFFERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS RESPOND

Educating children is more complex today than in the days of rote memorization and Dick and Jane readers. Today a child's education can conflict with a number of society's problems. It is difficult to learn multiplication tables when you are homeless or hungry. It is difficult to think about Shakespeare when you are a victim of cyber bullying. It is difficult to study for a test when you suspect that your friend might be contemplating suicide.

The weight of the world comes to school with many students today. Schools work hard to educate each child, but how do they deal with the multitude of society's problems?

This member education examines how the Jefferson County School District responds to and anticipates society's problems. These problems are very complex and there are multiple appropriate responses in each case. We have selected a few of these programs to spotlight.

BULLYING

Problem

Every day hundreds of students wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying has become a big problem that worries not only the students affected, but also parents, teachers and administrators who may not always be aware when it is happening. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry believes that nearly half of all children are bullied at some point during their school years. Whether it is hitting, destroying property, taunting, using racial slurs, spreading rumors, shunning, isolating, or using the internet, cell phones, or other devices to send "flames" or post images intended to hurt or embarrass another person, the results can be serious.

Children who are bullied have lower self-esteem and suffer higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. Bullies are also at risk for problems as they grow older. "Bullying is not like it used to be. It's much more manipulative and mean and it doesn't happen in the presence of adults and it doesn't happen in the school day," said Susan Payne, director of **Safe2Tell**, the state's student reporting service. "Bullying now happens on Facebook or Twitter or in text messages, and it spreads way beyond a small clique".

Addressing the problem

Each school adopts strategies to address violence. The **Second Step** curriculum in the elementary grades builds empathy and self-esteem while addressing anger management, conflict resolution and impulse control. These building blocks are reinforced throughout a child's school career.

One of the most effective programs available for schools, is **Rachel's Challenge**, named after Rachel Scott, the first student killed in the Columbine tragedy. Darrell Scott, Rachel's father, founded the organization that makes presentations around the country using writings and drawings from her diaries to show the need for a kinder, more compassionate nation. The mission of this non-religious, non-political, non-profit organization is to inspire every person to create a permanent positive culture change by starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion.

Shaffer Elementary recently participated in **Rachel's Challenge** and is now committed to promoting kindness and compassion to make the school a safer place to learn. Another group of students knows that words can hurt and wants to affect a change. At Conifer High School students want to eliminate the cruel use of the word "retard" or "retarded" in students' conversations. The campaign is called **Spread the Word to End the Word**, inspired by the Special Olympics and Best Buddies International, and it seeks to promote mutual respect and human dignity.

SUICIDE

Problem

Colorado ranks near the top nationally in suicides and it stands to reason that this problem is reflected among the state's youth. In 2009, 11 Colorado children between the ages of 10 and 14 killed themselves; this was up six from the previous year. Among youth between the ages of 15 and 19, there were 49 suicides last year compared to 45 in 2008. Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth between 15 and 24. In the past 60 years, the suicide rate has quadrupled for males in that age group and doubled for females.

Addressing the problem

Most high schools have at least one full-time mental health worker on duty. Schools also receive help from Jefferson Center Mental Health and their suicide prevention programs.

Assist is a two day, comprehensive workshop stressing suicide intervention skills. Of the 262 people who took the workshop last year, 40% were from the school district. **Safetalk** is a three hour workshop that trains people to recognize the signs of suicidal children and how to help them. It is often partnered with a three hour session stressing the issues facing Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (GLBTQ) students who are at higher risk for suicide attempts. The workshops also can be paired with a session for Latino/Latina students, **QPR** (Question, Persuade, Refer), a program that trains gatekeepers in each building who can recognize warning signs, ask the right questions, and act vigorously when a youth is thought to be suicidal. It is believed that four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs.

Another valuable tool in preventing suicides is **Second Wind**. In the 2001-02 school year Green Mountain High School was devastated when four students committed suicide within nine months. In response, leaders in the community created the Second Wind Fund whose mission is "to decrease the incidence of teen suicide nationally by removing financial and social barriers to treatment of at-risk youth and to create a network of local affiliates to provide such services in their own communities." Last year this nonprofit received more than 500 referrals of youth who attempted suicide or were at risk to do so. The affiliates (geographical branches of the organization) cover 80% of the youth population in Colorado. Referrals generally come from school counselors and the student is seen immediately by a screened and monitored therapist who must have expertise in adolescent mental health. This service is provided for students who are uninsured or underinsured.

SAFETY

Problem

How could violent events in the past at Columbine, Platte Canyon High School, and Deer Creek Middle School have been prevented?

Addressing the problem

Out of the heartbreaking tragedy of Columbine grew a simple and powerful program, **Safe2Tell**. The program gives students or others a safe, anonymous way to report any threatening behavior that endangers students and their community. Susan Price, the director of this statewide program, told a group of Jefferson County students, "You are the solution to your own problems. You have your own voice, you can use it to make the life of someone else better or worse. If you don't speak up for someone, sometimes no one else will. At Safe2Tell we provide a safe, anonymous way for you to speak up and make a difference in the life of someone who needs it."

Students have responded. Since the program began during the 2004-2005 school year, 2,782 tips have been called in concerning bullying, suicide threats, violence, gang activity and other dangerous activities. From those tips there have been 284 school disciplinary actions, 67 arrests, 282 preventions and interventions, and 796 students being closely monitored by school and resource police officers. Calls go to the Colorado State Patrol and the information is provided to local law enforcement and school officials. The calls are anonymous and there is no caller ID, but a caller is given a code number that can be checked online, in case Safe2Tell has further questions to ask.

Jefferson County is the only school district to pilot the **Safe2Text** program. Since Chatfield began the program in the fall of 2010, 28 serious tips about drugs (7), bullying (4), suicidal threats (3), and depression (3) have been taken. The **Safe2Tell** phone number, **Safe2Text** number and email address are located on the back of all middle and high school student's ID cards. **Safe2Text** messages are received 24/7 by the school district's dispatchers.

Safety and security in the schools is proactive, trying to keep ahead of problems. "We want to be emergency prepared, not emergency scared," states John McDonald, Executive Director of Safety, Security and Emergency Planning for Jeffco schools. All principals must attend Emergency Response Crisis Management classes each year, see that each school has a safety plan, train all staff on safety procedures, and ensure that students are trained and drilled on Standard Response Protocol. Municipalities and the Jeffco Sheriff's Department provide 28 full-time School Resource Officers (SRO). Each high school and a few middle schools have an officer present every day. All schools in the district are patrolled 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays.

DEPRESSION

Problem

Teen depression can affect a teen regardless of gender, social background, income level, or race. Statistics show that teen depression is a common problem. About 20 percent of teens will experience depression before they reach adulthood. Between 10 and 15 percent of teenagers have some symptoms of depression at any one time. About 5 percent of teens are suffering from major depression at any one time.

Addressing the problem

According to Linda Buzzard, the director of the Jeffco Department of Health Services for the district, there is a program in place to report signs of depression or other mental illness. Teachers, counselors and school clinic aides provide daily support for students. Students may use the **Safe2Tell** program, and the school system also uses the **Road to Resilience** program, sponsored by the American Psychological Association. It is based on the tenant that resilience is not a trait that people either possess or not, but rather it involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed by anyone.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Problem

Both hunger and obesity are problems that children all over our country have to deal with as well as the availability of nutritious food, particularly on limited budgets. The percentage of children who are obese has more than doubled, and the percentage of obesity in adolescents has tripled since 1980. The good news is that schools can help students and staff adopt healthy eating and physical activity behaviors that are the keys to preventing obesity as well as addressing hunger.

Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In a population-based sample of 5 to 17 year-olds, 70% of obese youth had at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Children and adolescents who are obese are also at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem. Healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating and physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases.

Addressing the problem

The Jefferson County School district has the following goals to support student wellness:

1. The district will provide a comprehensive learning environment for developing and practicing lifelong wellness behaviors.
2. The district will promote and support healthy dietary habits, contributing to students' health status and academic performance.
3. The district will provide opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.

As a result of two grants received by the school district, the position of Jeffco Healthy Schools Coordinator is a reality. The overall goal of the Comprehensive Health Education Grant for 2010-2011 is to meet the requirement of addressing the new Comprehensive Health Education Standards adopted in December of 2009 by the Colorado Department of Education, and plan for the future addition of the new health standards into the district's curriculum. At this time 40 schools are participating in the grant.

Elementary schools currently provide 45 minutes of P.E. classes alternating during the week with 45 minutes of art and music so that each is provided every third day. This plan has been in existence for many years. According to Amy Dillon, the Healthy Schools Coordinator, many individual schools are doing a much better job of encouraging physical activity during the school day, especially the schools participating in the Healthy Schools Colorado grant. This program includes offering students at least 15 minutes of recess (in addition to lunch recess) along with promotion of physical activity for all students, offering ongoing physical activity programs that meet the school's needs (such as intramural programs, walking or running clubs, bike to school programs, etc.), incorporating daily physical activity breaks into the school day, encouraging parents and students to participate in a monthly family exercise challenge, and working with parents to accompany students to walk or bike to school on a weekly basis. The goal is to have all students doing some type of physical activity, both inside and outside the school day, for 60 minutes per day.

Many problems face all school districts that serve lunches and breakfasts to any and all students, especially lower income students. The limited funding resources limit how much and what kinds of nutritious meals can be served. The executive director of the Food and Nutrition Services for Jeffco is Linda Stoll. USDA School Lunch, Breakfast and commodity food programs are used. For the last 15 years Jeffco has used processed foods. In the current year healthier entrees are being offered, such as, school prepared macaroni and cheese, chicken quesadillas and penne pasta. These are not made from processed foods. Made-from-scratch meals are generally more expensive, and can only be used within the fiscal limits of the district. The middle and high schools have food bars available. They are offered each day a selection of one type - a pasta bar, a build your own burrito, Asian bar, or burger bar (so far no veggie burgers as they are still out of their price range). This is in addition to the entrees and entrée salad bars.

In the effort to be green or sustainable, the elementary schools no longer use styrofoam plates or trays and have returned to dishes, trays, and silverware that are washed at the school. The cleaners that are now being used are all certified green. However, all of these efforts are more costly and meal prices will have to be increased.

Regarding hunger for the children who are very low income or homeless, there is a new program in 18 schools called "universal free breakfast". This program takes the place of the free before school breakfast program which was not very heavily attended because children riding the buses arrived too late to participate. The "universal free breakfast" is a bag breakfast that is given to every student after school has started. Nationally this program has been found to have resulted in less tardiness, less absenteeism, fewer clinic visits, and an increase in learning.

The school meals program's aim is to provide a positive meal environment and encourage development of good eating habits by providing a variety of healthy and nutritional choices that the students will enjoy eating.

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Problem

Increasing numbers of kindergarten through grade 6 students who have no adult or responsible sibling at home either before or after school hours. They need to be supervised and to have productive time in an environment that is safe and enjoyable.

Addressing the problem

There are multiple providers of Before and After School care for children in the Jefferson County elementary schools. Two of the larger providers are the Foothills Recreation District and Jeffco Schools SAE (School Age Enrichment). Their services and fees are general examples of the programs operating in the county.

Jeffco Schools SAE is available at 21 schools. According to Cathy Lytle, Director, these programs serve children between 6:30 am and 6:00 pm each school day. There is a \$35 annual enrollment fee per student and a \$50 fee per family. Each day costs \$19 to \$20 depending on the length of the program, or \$12.50 to \$15.50 for after school care only. A healthy snack is provided both morning and afternoon. Ratio of children to adults is 15:1 or less. Scholarships are available and some children are eligible for 20% off the fee if they are also qualified for free and reduced lunches. The primary locations in the schools are cafeterias with some gym time. Community time is structured into the program for activities such as art center, reading and writing, dramatic play, science and math. Planned homework time is emphasized. The focus is on learning and the program is self supporting.

Foothills Child Care program provides 8 Jeffco elementary schools with in-school programs and 7 with pick-up and transportation to either the Peak Recreation Center or the Lilley Gulch Center. According to Amber Selby, Director, programs are provided from 6:45 am to 6:00 pm with additional charges for a late pick-up. There is a \$55 annual enrollment fee per child with \$80 maximum per family. There is no differential for children who do not live in the Foothills area. Fees are variable depending on school hours, but do include transportation to facilities as well as activities and a healthy snack. A Foothills staff member acts as a full time director at each site. Scholarships are available through the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program. If a child is denied, he can generally get a subsidized scholarship. Care is also available for teacher work days, as well as, early release days and many of the students also use the summer programs offered by both groups.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Problem

The lure of the American dream brings a steady stream of people from places far and near to cross our borders and enter our ports and airports. Many of these people speak only their own language. It has become a challenge to educate the children of these immigrants so they can take part in the mainstream of our educational system and become proficient English speakers.

Addressing the problem

In Jeffco Schools the ESL/Dual Language Programs provide two methods of instruction for English language learners: English as a Second Language (ESL) and Dual Language Education. The goal of both methods is to provide English language learners with English language skills they need to meaningfully participate in the district's regular mainstream classes.

All elementary schools offer ESL services. The methodology includes instruction in the four domains of English language; listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the secondary level, English as a Second Language services exist at all middle and high schools with the exception of Conifer High School. There are 7 schools that offer Dual Language programs.

Instruction focuses on developing the skills needed to demonstrate adequate yearly growth and attain grade level proficiency while meeting challenging state academic standards. At the secondary schools, a variety of ESL or sheltered content courses are taught by ESL tutors and mainstream content teachers through curriculum designed to meet linguistic and academic needs of secondary students learning English as a second language.

GREAT TEACHERS

Problem

As we look for solutions to the ever grim view that education in our country is in crisis, teachers seem to hold the key. People feel that great schools start with great teachers. How to get there is not so clear. Many feel that standardized test scores should play a role in teacher evaluations. Others support the idea of merit pay on the basis of effectiveness. Very few support the current system of tenure for teachers. Money also plays a role, from thinking the best qualified don't go into the field because of low pay, others don't stay because of pay.

Addressing the problem

The Jeffco school district has received a five-year federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to pilot strategic compensation for licensed staff in high-needs schools. The funding of \$32.8 million will allow up to 20 schools to participate.

This is the culmination of three years of collaboration among the district, Jefferson County Education Association, Jefferson County Administrators Association, parents and community leaders to develop a strategic compensation plan that rewards excellent educators and increases student achievement.

The grant means that Jeffco schools will be at the forefront of developing new ways to compensate educators here and across the nation. The district will be testing the impact of strategic compensation on increasing student achievement, and attracting, retaining and awarding top educators.

Strategic compensation is a cultural shift in how educators are paid and how they navigate their career paths. Instead of paying teachers solely based on years of experience and more education, they will be rewarded for outstanding performance.

Jeffco's plan is based on three pillars of educational excellence – student learning, teacher learning and teacher leadership. Educators will be rewarded for meeting individual, team and schools goals as well as receiving successful evaluations and taking leadership roles.

This member education is a brief snapshot of the many programs that the school district has in place. Your discussion leader will have more information on these topics, as well as, a list of the resources that were used to compile this paper in the event that you need more information about the topics covered.

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