

THE STILLMAN

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

Social work goes to school

Making an impact in the classroom and beyond



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Innovative initiative educates Dublin teachers as social workers



The College of Social Work is partnering with Dublin City Schools to train 25 teachers and staffers in the district to become licensed social workers in order to better address the mental health needs of students.

Dublin superintendent Dr. John Marschhausen says there are not enough external mental health providers to serve the district, which encompasses about 17,000 students and 24 school buildings.

“I was hearing from parents that it was a six-to-eight-month wait before they could get in to see a counselor if their child was considering suicide, was considering self-harm or was struggling,” he says.

“Rather than just complaining about a problem, our team started thinking about how we could solve the problem.”

That led to the partnership between the school district and the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI), led by professor and executive director Dr. Dawn Anderson-Butcher. If the initiative is successful, it could become a model for other school districts in Ohio.

“There is certainly a huge shortage of behavioral mental health workers, and there is an increasing need for child and adolescent social work and mental health practice. This is one way to potentially address it,” Anderson-Butcher says.

Dr. Samantha Bates, an assistant professor in the college, is co-leading the initiative. The college will train 25

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midcareer teachers and staffers over the next two years. Each will earn a master’s degree in social work with an emphasis on mental health after taking courses at Ohio State and completing field placement in the school district.

The key is that more children will get access to social workers, with a bonus that teachers should see their stress levels reduced. “They have another resource to help them,” Bates says.

She noted that the initiative, which is funded by COVID relief funds, will include a rigorous research component.

The teachers and staffers were selected from a field of 45 applicants. They represent those who are most passionate about children’s mental health and who voiced a strong desire to be part of the solution by returning to school to advance their careers.

Nicole Durant, a second-grade teacher at Chapman Elementary, says she signed on because “it’s a great opportunity to be able to help more kids learn strategies to help them become successful.”

“I think the biggest thing is that Dublin City Schools are taking the mental health of their students so seriously,” she says.

Tiffany deSilva (MSW ’05), a member of the Dublin City Schools board, says she has received only positive feedback from administrators and teachers. She expects the initiative to make a noticeable difference.

“One of the things people might not realize is that in having a diverse district, we have students with diverse needs,” she says. “You might have one student who is struggling with stress around being an overachiever. You might have a student who is a refugee and just coming to this country and learning the language.”

ANOTHER JOINT INITIATIVE

Anderson-Butcher says CAYCI previously established a partnership with the Dublin district to have graduate students complete 18-month internships as part of their field placement. There were four interns last school year, and CAYCI recently received a new contract to extend the initiative.

Current intern Allison Dorr (MSW ’24) is getting to know the students at Hopewell Elementary and their needs. “We have a lot of students with anxiety right now,” she says. “This school just opened in 2020, but because of COVID most of the students were not full time until this past school year. So a lot of them are lacking some social skills that we work on.” ■