

A Social Work Department Story to Share in Honor of National School Social Worker Week

The Merrillville Community School Corporation has been fortunate enough to have at least one school social worker in every building to support the social, emotional and behavioral needs of our students. That being said, we have experienced periods throughout the school year in which our social worker resources have been stretched to their limits. Historically, when public schools experience budget cuts the first areas to feel the impact are typically extracurricular activities and supportive services. Merrillville has managed to avoid this trend by making a conscious decision to do the opposite. Students in Merrillville not only have the option of participating in over 60 extracurricular activities, including fine arts, sports, and clubs; students have access to school social workers who focus on providing ongoing support and guidance in a student's social, emotional and behavioral growth and well-being. These services are provided using micro and macro strategies that involve tending to student/family individual needs, as well as looking at systemic trends that are captured in ongoing student/family data that is collected throughout the school year.

Merrillville School Social Workers collect and use student data to identify and track the most prevalent student issues to determine what services and programming need to be put in place, evaluate program and service impact, and make program adjustments to better service our students and families. Have we perfected this process? Absolutely not, we are constantly making changes in how data is collected in an effort to balance the delivery of services to students, staff and families while finding the time to consistently track data on services provided.

When looking at the educational needs of students today, it is common knowledge that social-emotional learning has become one of the educational pillars of a student's educational experience in public schools. School Social Workers are uniquely positioned to support this particular student educational experience, using the same academic template for generating strategies for

supporting student mastery in academic skills. This process involves collecting student data, identifying areas of academic concern and developing strategies that support student mastery. Does this sound familiar? Ensuring the presence of School Social Workers has never been more critical if we are to truly meet the educational needs of our 21st-century student learners.

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