

I agree with Senator Bye's urging to hire school social workers for all schools in order to prevent violence and support a safe school climate.

As a social worker for 12 years in public schools in CT, I am the first line of defense in helping children adjust behaviorally and emotionally. I have witnessed the increasing demands on children and their families and the results of stress, anxiety and mental illness. My role facilitating groups (anxiety, divorce, grief and loss, social skills and anger management) and individual counseling as well as proactive committees like Peer Mediation, School Ambassadors and Safe School Climate Committee give children a place to process, feel supported and develop skills essential to getting along. I have numerous children seeking me out daily from K-5th grade to talk about problems at home, problems with friends, loss of pet or loved one or when they are in other emotional crisis. Teachers while willing to process and support a child have 20 other students to continue teaching. Without me, they would not have any support for these children.

I have also encountered a handful of mentally ill children exhibiting features of conduct disorder, borderline personality or bipolar. While they are very young to diagnose it is essential to get the conversation with families started and collaborate for services with outside agencies, etc. The greatest challenge in this area isn't in identifying and supporting these children but getting the families to acknowledge the potential diagnosis and need for support. This is an area that needs to be addressed more aggressively.

I can't imagine our school without a social worker and have been fortunate to work in a District that has always supported our work. Our children deserve our support and the more legislation appreciates what we do, the more chance the families will too especially in light of the tragedy at Sandy Hook.

Best Regards,

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