

To Whom it May Concern,

I have worked in North Haven Public Schools for 26 years as a School Social Worker. The first 23 years I worked at Montowese Elementary School.

The last three years I work at the High School in North Haven. I have the luxury of seeing the beginning and end of a student's education.

Student success is often based on the family's ability to provide a network of support for that child. Student failure is often based on the lack of stability that is offered to this child by his or her family/social supports.

In my experience I see students who struggled who have become successful and students who had struggled at the elementary fail at the high school.

I will tell you about a student.

I will name Max. He came to the Montowese at age 5, his mother was concerned because he was anxious about separating. I was able to work with she and Max and make a referral to our community supported day care. I help facilitate Max coming to kindergarten that next year. He then made a successful transition with the support I offered him and his parent. The family had a complicated background the father had received special education for emotional problems and the mother was a immigrant from Poland. He struggled throughout elementary but with my regular support and help from a reading teacher he met w/ success.

I met up with him last year again as a freshman and he struggled academically. With my help and counsel with Max and his family we referred him to our alternative high school named TOW (the other way). He was able to meet success in that small regular ed environment, he always maintained a good attitude. Last year our district closed TOW and we have no alternate school at this time. Max is on the edge of failing and what I am most concerned about is his attitude changed. He no longer see how he can be successful given the environmental supports he needed are taken away. I continue to support him and hopefully will find a plan that will support him here in the high school. He parents are good people and yet max struggles but with our support he hopefully will not fail.

Upon entering kindergarten a trained mental health professional can often easily identify the neediest of the social emotional children. Primary Prevention is successful with many of these students. The components of this are consultation with elementary teachers, consultation and providing parent education to the care givers, referral to community mental health providers and direct service to students. The direct service ranges from crisis intervention (up to 8 hours a week) and providing behavioral strategies and developing behavioral plans; individual counseling ½ hr a week to teach management and coping skills; ½ hr a week in social skills groups to teach students how to successfully interact with peers and much more. The social worker is the person in a school who will do what no one else can do when faced with emotional breakdowns and conflicts. Mental Health Supports are necessary for some students successes

In North Haven last year we cut 2 social workers at the elementary level and closed the Alternative School. Our community based Mental Health Clinic only has 3 clinicians to refer students to and there is not a child psychiatrist associated with the clinic. Mental Health Issues left untreated will not disappear. It is import we provide primary prevention thought the lifespan of a student's education.
Susan McNamara, LCSW School Social Worker