



Newsletter

Wellness Warriors Newsletter FEB/MAR 2021 Vol. IV, No. 2

Mission Statement: "Inspire the passion for learning and educating all students to achieve their full potential."



Mental Health as a Pathway to Total Wellness

Last month, at a School Board Nutrition Committee Meeting, hosted by Board Trustee Robinson, Board Trustee Walker gave a compassionate and compelling presentation on mental health. She used quotes and facts to make her points on the importance of mental health for overall wellness. For this issue of the Wellness Warriors Newsletter we interviewed Trustee Walker on her thoughts and feelings on the issue:

Wellness Warrior Newsletter (WWN): How did you come up with the idea for "Mental Health as a Pathway to Total Wellness" for the district?

Trustee Walker (TW): I came up with the idea for "Mental Health as a Pathway to Total Wellness," for the district after I learned of two recent incidences of staff and students running away from home in December 2020 to deal with their problems. Our staff member was overwhelmed with grief and was missing from her family for approximately 24 hours. The two students were dealing with conditions like depression, sexual identity issues, absenteeism, and family issues. One student was subsequently hospitalized for psychiatric care. I consider AWOL of minors and adults a serious mental health red flag. I knew then there were mental health issues happening in our district that needed to be addressed.

WWN: Why is mental health important to you?

TW: Mental health is important to me because I believe in "mind-body-soul balance" to achieve a healthy lifestyle because one does not function well without the other. Life is filled with daily stressors as it is; and with the onset of the novel coronavirus, those stressors are exacerbated for everyone. Though resilient, I can only begin to wonder how our students are processing all of the transitions related to learning. I think we are mostly surviving the best ways we can, but it can be tough. I'm invested in having districtwide discussions to brainstorm healthier strategies for our entire school community.

WWN: As a Board Trustee, why do you feel it is your responsibility to focus on mental health and wellness?

TW: As Vice President for the Board of Education, which is the governing body of Wyandanch Union Free School District, I am responsible for creating policies that center equity and the whole child to achieve academically. On February 8, 2021, I presented a short book on policy readings at our district Policy Committee Meeting that included a Mental Health Policy as an extension to the Wellness Policy that is currently being reviewed. I am committed to student and staff wellbeing. I pledged SEL and Mental Health advocacy as major platform components when I ran for election last term because our Wyandanch community and schools clearly demonstrate needs in these areas.

WWN: If you could implement ONE solution to the challenge of mental health in the district, what would it be?

TW: If I could implement one solution to the challenge of mental health in the district, it would be first increasing awareness about what mental health is and how it is interpreted. There are stigmas in black and brown communities around appearing “crazy” for seeking out counseling/therapy or more, a false narrative that black and brown people are strong, with a higher tolerance for pain and therefore can handle mind pressure without professional help. Mental health needs and disorders transcend race and gender.

I propose the development and implementation of a Human Resources booklet that lists services and providers directly geared to address those uncomfortable feelings and disorders like shame, guilt, grief, stress, anxiety, depression, behavior issues, family issues, social withdrawal and substance/chemical dependency. We need to list our school clinicians and SEL supports so families know who to contact on a district level. I introduced an equity survey as a data tool to gauge the sense of belonging for students and staff that I have confidence will be instrumental.

Intersectional collaboration should become a norm; similar to when I joined in talks with the Wellness Committee around this topic last month.

WWN: Is there anything else you would like to say regarding mental health in the Wyandanch School Community?

TW: I want to say acceptance and accountability as Core Values in our district will guide our school culture to have respect for the rights, differences, and dignity of ourselves and others to be vulnerable enough to share and listen to the mental health adversities we encounter first hand or vicariously. I want our school community to know the Board of Education is taking accountability for making sound policy dedicated to our total wellbeing, starting with mental health as a pathway.

Thank you, Trustee Walker!

What is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

EAP is free, confidential and voluntary. This means that there is no charge for Wyandanch USFD employees meeting with an EAP Counselor. It means that your problems are not discussed with supervisors, personnel officers or union leaders. And the voluntary nature of the program means that the decision to participate in EAP is strictly up to you. A supervisor may recommend that an employee seek help from EAP, but the employee is not required to do so.

EAP offers a Counselor who is a trained and experienced qualified mental health professional, with a degree in Social Work or Counseling. The EAP Counselor is bound by the EAP policy of total confidentiality.

Your EAP provides services 12 months a year and is here for you during school vacations and throughout the summer. Both daytime and evening hours are available by appointment.

Commack Office
154 Commack Road, Suite 210
Commack, NY 11725
631-218-5445

