

Ken-Ton to Be Among First 'Trauma-Informed' Districts

Through a partnership with the University at Buffalo Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care, the Ken-Ton School District will be among the first in Western New York to implement a comprehensive district-wide framework of trauma-informed practices.

Trauma can come from a variety of sources in a child's life. Everything from an incident such as accident or death to long-term factors such as abuse, neglect, abandonment, and homelessness can cause trauma in a child. This might have a profound impact on how a child is able to learn and function in school.

Classroom teachers, staff, and administrators may not know what this child is facing. Well-meaning adults might inadvertently make things worse if they do not know the child has been impacted by trauma or the best approaches to take with such children.

By becoming a trauma-informed district, the Ken-Ton School District will ensure that all staff are trained in understanding and identifying trauma in children.

Leading this effort is Michael F. Lewis, Ph.D., director of special education and student services, and Janet Cerra, Family Support Center director. This work is being facilitated by Susan Green and Tom Nochajski Ph.D., co-directors of the Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care, part of the UB School of Social Work.

This partnership was made possible by a grant through the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, a local foundation which supports initiatives in the areas of mental health, substance use disorders, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities. Dr. Lewis successfully applied for the grant in September, and in December the district was awarded a two-year \$135,940 grant.

The initiative focuses on building a school- and district-wide structure to cultivate awareness of trauma – what types of trauma children may face; how it impacts their ability to learn and function in school; how it might impact attendance and behavior; and how actions by adults can impact, both positively and negatively, a child who has faced trauma.

The structures presently in place to support the social-emotional well-being of students, such as the school counselors, psychologists and social workers and the district's Family Support Center, will still carry out the care of children who have faced trauma. The initiative will ensure that all staff have a solid understanding of what they can watch for and expect and to tailor their approach in the most beneficial way possible for children who have faced trauma.

"Acute trauma can impair concentration and memory," Cerra



Champion Team members participate in the first of three Trauma 101 trainings on March 28.

said. "Intrusive thoughts, interrupted sleep, nightmares, moodiness, frustration, anger and social withdrawal are common. Chronic trauma can result in language deficits, executive functioning deficits impacting goal setting, organization, planning, anticipating consequences, distorted views of the world, and poor relationships with school staff and peers that impact learning. Becoming a trauma-sensitive district can help to mediate the impact of the trauma and encourage these and all students become successful."

Each school will have a Champion Team, comprised of five to seven faculty, staff and administrators, who will facilitate a culture of awareness and understanding of trauma.

"The role of each Champion Team is to assist with the continued school roll-out of the training and facilitating trauma-informed awareness among staff," Dr. Lewis said.

Over the implementation period, trainings will be provided for all school staff beginning with Champion Teams at each of the district's nine school buildings. The first of three Trauma 101 trainings for Champion Team members took place on March 28. This is the training that will be provided for all staff, everyone from school administrators and classroom teachers to food service workers and bus drivers.

"The expectation is that by the end of our roll-out, every staff member will have received that training, Trauma 101, which addresses how trauma affects children," Lewis said.

This way, everyone who interacts with children at any point in any capacity will have an understanding of trauma.

Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Plan Initiative Underway

Since the fall, the Ken-Ton School District has engaged in a collaborative process to create a strategic plan that will encompass a new vision/mission statement, goals, core values and beliefs, strategies, and action plans.

The strategic planning process was initiated by Superintendent Stephen Bovino and the Board of Education for the 2017-18 school year and is entitled "Ken-Ton Forward." Its purpose is to chart the future course of the Ken-Ton School District by establishing long-range goals

and an operational blueprint to make those goals a reality. The plan is expected to be completed in May and will guide decision-making for years to come.

This process has been guided by a core team of stakeholders with representation by the Board of Education, Kenmore Teachers Association, Kenmore Administrators Association, Kenmore-Tonawanda School Employees Association, district office, students, parents, law enforcement, senior citizens, business owners, and the Town Council. Stakeholder

groups were surveyed in the fall, and the results were reviewed by the Core Team in December.

Task forces were created for each of three goal areas identified by the Core Team: Interventions, Social-Emotional Wellness, and Technology. The task forces completed their work in February and March and the Core Team reconvened to review their recommendations.

You can follow the strategic planning process and find more information at www.ktufsd.org/strategicplan.