

Ken-Ton to Become 'Trauma-Informed' School District

Social workers from UB offer staff training to help children most in need

By Amy Wallace, Sun Staff Reporter

The Ken-Ton Board of Education took another step toward becoming a Trauma-Informed School District at its meeting Tuesday.

Faculty of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work presented the Trauma-Informed Educational Practices Initiative to the school board.

"We are very excited to be working with the district on this," Don Matteson, chief program officer of the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, said. "It is great [the district] had the foresight to do this. They are the first district in Western New York and the state to become fully trauma informed."

The program is being funded and sponsored by the Tower Foundation and the UB School of Social Work. The Tower Foundation supports community programming that helps children and young adults affected by substance abuse, learning disabilities, mental illness, and intellectual disabilities.

One of the first steps to becoming a trauma-informed school is training educators to better understand the impact of trauma on students' academic achievement and behavior. Students can experience trauma in areas such as domestic violence, parental substance abuse, child abuse and neglect among other forms of trauma.

Sue Green, co-director of The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care, Buffalo Center for Social Research at the UB School of Social Work, said the process is more

than a series of boxes to check or seminars to attend.

"It's a digestive process, it's really a cultural shift. We know that we are creating a change in a school system and that takes involving the workforce," she said.

The steps the district must take to become trauma-informed include student evaluations and training, consultation and coaching for teachers, staff and community across the school district.

Trauma-informed districts include a positive behavior intervention and supports program, counseling groups, health committees, curriculum decisions, staff development and crisis protocols on how to address student trauma.

There are many ways to weave trauma-informed approaches into the fabric of schools, including strategic planning by administrators, staff training, and direct intervention with traumatized students.

"When we talk about overcoming trauma and adversity, it's not just the students but also we found the staff have experienced trauma in their own personal lives," Green said.