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An important tool for teachers

U-46's trauma training recognizes that problems outside school can affect learning

EDITORIAL



A teacher at Abbott Middle School works on a mindfulness exercise with students to help them deal with stresses that might affect their learning and performance in school. *Madhu Krishnamurthy | Staff Photographer*

Imagine a child whose life is marked by daily trauma caused by poverty, abuse, neglect, divorce, mental illness or the loss of a parent.

Now imagine how difficult it would be for that child to overcome those distractions and focus on academics.

Elgin Area School District U-46 officials don't have to imagine, because an estimated 30 percent of their students face what experts call multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences. At one school, Abbott Middle School, 90 percent of the 700 students come from low-income families.

But the district is trying to address the issue by training teachers and employees at five schools to provide trauma-informed care to recognize the factors causing anxiety in their students' lives and offer ways to reduce their stress and improve focus.

This new approach could be an important tool for teachers, who spend so many hours each week with these young people, to be able to better understand the students' social-emotional needs and work to provide some help for them to be successful in the classroom.

It also represents an advance in our understanding of the challenges to learning that may exist at home, and in confronting them. The truth is, if a student is worried about basic needs for food, shelter and safety, concentrating on a reading assignment is likely not a priority.

"We hold them (students) accountable. But trauma-informed care is really helping us understand on a more holistic basis on what's going on in their lives," John

Heiderscheidt, U-46's director of school safety and culture, told our Madhu Krishnamurthy.

U-46, which eventually wants to train all of its employees in trauma care, is not alone in this effort. The Illinois Education Association is providing training for several suburban districts, including those in Cary, Batavia, Crystal Lake, Libertyville, Mundelein and Schaumburg.

Teachers learn to respond to and address the factors in students' lives that cause agitation. In response, they conduct mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises and other meditative practices, to help students focus better and self-regulate emotionally.

What's impressive about the U-46 effort is it was launched by a community initiative. The Alignment Collaboration for Education is a diverse partnership among U-46, Elgin Community College, Judson University, the city of Elgin, Gail Borden Public Library, Advocate Sherman Hospital, the Grand Victoria Foundation, United Way of Elgin and other government, nonprofit, business and community groups.

Such broad community support could further encourage the program to grow and be more proactive. In doing so, it could be a difference maker for many children.

SPORTS SECTION

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Girls Soccer: Larkin gets easy W over Belvidere

BY ALLEN OSHINSKI

Larkin's girls soccer team is developing a knack for scoring in bunches.

Elizabeth Baeza, Kelly Leon and Miriam Rojas scored 2 goals each as the Royals stayed undefeated on the season with an 8-1 nonconference rout of Belvidere at Memorial Field in Elgin Monday night.

Ariana King added 2 assists.

The Royals started slowly, getting only a goal from King in the first 30 minutes. But when Rojas scored her first goal, off a King assist, in the 28th minute, it seemed to open the floodgates.

Rosemary Arvizu and Baeza found the net in rapid succession and the rout was on.

"We started really slow and lethargic," said Larkin coach Ken Hall. "We played two games on Saturday and a game on Friday and it just seemed like we didn't have our legs a little bit. But it started going and then we played a little bit better. In the second half, we possessed the ball a little bit better, made better decisions."

Rather than relax after intermission, the Royals kept the pressure on. Leon scored just 40 seconds into the second half, and goals by Baeza and a second by Leon followed in close succession.

Rojas scored her second in the final minute.

The Royals, who won their fifth straight to start the season, have been getting offensive contributions from throughout the lineup.

"We're playing more like a team this year," Hall said. "At times I think we almost pass the ball too much. We're a lot more team-oriented this year, and I'm really liking the way we've been playing so far."

The Royals' defense was solid as well: the Bucs mustered just 3 shots on goal.

Belvidere did put 3 balls in the net. Yamitssa Andrade put a ball in the net at the end of the first half, but it came just after the horn. Luzia Hernandez had a goal but was clearly offside. Alondra Murillo finally got one that counted on a free kick with 2:43 remaining, spoiling the shutout for the Royals.