

The Oriole Corner

*This week's Oriole Corner has been written by guest columnist
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CHARLOTTE PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT SERVICES: The 'behind the scenes' supports that benefit students, staff and our community.

Many of us can identify the successes of Charlotte Public Schools beyond our academic endeavors: sports, band, vocal choir, arts, leadership camps, STEM competition and several clubs that offer students the opportunity to grow in a variety of ways. Caring PTOs, Boosters and supportive community businesses work hand in hand with our schools providing resources for success. But there are also programs that work to support students on other, very significant levels. Charlotte Public Schools provide emotional and behavioral support, and in addition, provide services outside of school that assist students and their families to effectively engage in school. You may not know about these efforts, often because of student confidentiality, but it is worthy to note these programs are available and working well. Truancy, office referrals and student misbehaviors are being addressed in new, effective ways.

Charlotte, as well as most Michigan communities, have seen a changing demographic in our community over the past several years. We have many families that are struggling and in need of services. Charlotte Public Schools meet these needs by assisting students in attending and remaining in school. There is federal legislation called the McKinney-Vento Act that mandates local school districts support students that are experiencing homelessness. One support is to provide transportation to students to help them remain in school when they have moved to a shelter or are forced to temporarily live with others due to a loss of personal housing. Our district also provides school supplies, personal care items and clothing to those in need. These services are minimally funded by the federal government; it is the school district that commits to caring for students both during and after the school day. Without meeting the most basic of human needs, our students can't work successfully in the classroom. Building staff make the Student Services Office aware of homeless students, or families may directly contact the office at 517-541-5130.

The emotional needs of our students have become increasingly apparent as families struggle with the stressors of modern life. Our Charlotte Board of Education recognizes these needs and have provided full time Student Support Specialists (SSS) in each school building. Our SSS serve both the students and the staff by providing care that includes counseling, teaching students how to manage and regulate their behaviors, addressing grief and depression, building healthy relationships with friends and the adults in their lives, as well as providing the security of knowing 'people at school care about me'.

These challenges may be met by providing a 'check in/check out time' with students that need the start of the school day to begin on a positive note and end with an afterschool plan. SSS staff build relationships with students by coming in to the classroom and teaching lessons that focus on these basic skills. Students may meet with SSS to discuss individual concerns they have about

a variety of issues. Students may be involved in social groups that are specific to them and unique to their needs to grow in understanding circumstances in their lives. Examples include being a part of a friendship group while working on building trust, and understanding what it is to depend on one another. Other groups may focus on grief and loss. Suicide awareness and prevention is an important aspect of the SSS role. SSS staff often meet with students individually and confidentially, to assist in providing support to those who struggle with a variety of traumatic incidents in their lives.

You will see our Student Support Specialists in our hallways, lunchrooms, recess times and at the busses during arrival and departure, all with a focus on letting students know there are people at school that you can trust to listen, provide guidance and help to tackle the tough situations so many kids experience. SSS are visible members of our Charlotte team that work behind the scenes to give children what they need. SSS may connect families with community resources such as area healthcare providers, housing assistance, Community Mental Health, Health and Human Services as well as local food banks. Children require more than academics, they need a place to connect with caring adults outside of their homes. 'It takes a village to raise a child' is an African proverb that is often quoted. Indeed it is true; our schools are a village and require the work of many to support the growth and success of our children.

GO ORIOLES! ORIOLE PRIDE!