



Social Worker Reduction Update

To: Members of the Lowell School Committee

From: Jeannine M. Durkin, Superintendent

Date: May 15, 2019

The following report is provided in response to a request during the May 6, 2019 Budget Hearing for additional information relative to the proposed Social Worker cuts in the 2019-2020 Budget.

District Social Worker:

The position of District Social Worker was cut mid-year along with other key positions during FY19 in order to help address budget challenges district-wide. The District Social Worker served as the lead on the District-wide Crisis Team and served as the conduit between the city, schools and families in times of a crisis as well as served as a key member of the District Crisis Planning Team. In addition, this administrator provided monthly professional development and supervision for all of the Social Workers district-wide. The District Social Worker also wrote and managed grants that afford the district additional mental health professionals for the schools and Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Training for all staff district-wide.

At present, the former District Social Worker is serving in the role of Coordinator of Safety for the District, which is a two year grant funded position. In this role, she oversees all of the safety planning and initiatives district-wide including serving as the facilitator of the District-wide Crisis Team and serves as the conduit between the city, schools, and families in times of a crisis (roles that she provided as District Social Worker).

In the absence of the District Social Worker role, the additional duties of planning and facilitating district-wide professional development and supervision for Social Workers will be provided via a stipend to one of the Social Workers in our schools similar to our Lead Teacher Roles. This is not a perfect solution, however, given the current budget, it can provide some stability in the interim.

Should additional funds become available, it is the recommendation of this Leadership Team to reconstitute the District Social Worker position as a Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health and eliminate the Social Worker stipend. Over the course of the past year, we have established a Task Force charged with making recommendations for Pre-K-12 Social Emotional Learning through our partnership with DESE and the exSEL Network. A Coordinator is essential to launch this important work district-wide as well as guarantee that we are continually assessing mental health services and providing tiered supports to ensure that all students succeed.

Refugee Social Worker:

There were two (2) Refugee Social Worker positions funded for three years under the Elementary Counseling Grant which ended in August of 2018. One of the positions was maintained in the FY19 Budget. This position supports refugee families upon arrival to the Lowell Public Schools and helps families acclimate to our schools and city. Over the course of the past two years, the new families arriving to Lowell have decreased and although the numbers appear to be high (see attached data), they represent families that have been with us from one (1) year up to five (5) years with the exception of five (5) new refugee students in 2018-2019.

This is not to minimize the needs of our students and families, however, given the number of students having declined, the Social Workers assigned to each building can provide supports to these families and access the systems put in place as a result of the grant implementation. These supports mirror those provided by our school-based social workers such as individual student assessment, counseling, case management, parent outreach, teacher/staff consultation, crisis intervention, outside referrals, and connection to support services in the city. In addition, the Coordinator of English Language Education Dr. Phala Chea will continue to provide supports to our refugee students and their families upon arrival and through her work with the International Institute.

Refugee Arrivals for 2019-2020:

We have communicated with the International Institute and they report not having refugee numbers to share at this time as they have had in past years. They are not expecting notification relative to such estimates nor are they anticipating large numbers of additional refugees given the current governmental policies and procedures that are in place.

Given the reduction in refugee numbers and the current governmental policies, it is this Leadership Team's recommendation to not fill this position for the 2019-2020 school year and reassess the position during the FY21 budget process.