

The Wildcat Chronicles

Durant High School

September 19, 2019

Teachers take suicide prevention course

By Nicole Brown

Employees at Durant High School are required for the first time this year to take suicide prevention and postvention training online to keep Durant students safe.

This training is now mandated by the state of Iowa in all schools for all certified staff and associates. Not all teachers have taken the training course yet because the server the training course is on was down for a small period of time but should be back up and running now. All employees also have until the middle of September to complete this training course.

Principal Mr. Joel Diederichs said the training will be very beneficial for the student body.

"I think it can help," he said. "I think in this day and age I don't know if there is any school no matter how big or small where there is no mental health prominence. Unfortunately mental health affects all of us, especially students."

Student Kaylee Behrensmeyer said she supports the training and thinks it will benefit students at Durant High School.

"I feel the training could be a good thing depending on what the teachers are be-

ing trained to do," she said.

"If a student is feeling suicidal, I don't think that it would be obvious to tell because he/she would try to hide it or fit in as best as possible. With the size that Durant is, most teachers know their students and are possibly close, but with any school larger than ours, I don't think that anything could be done to prevent those thoughts."

During this new training, teachers learn to identify different indicators someone with suicidal thoughts may show through the acronym FACTS.

F stands for the feelings someone with suicidal thoughts might feel. *A* stands for actions that students feeling this way might take. *C* stands for the changes someone might go through during this time of hardship. *T* is for possible threats that staff might hear a student make. Lastly, *S* is for the situations students might be going through.

Math teacher Mrs. Abigail Straube said the training is self-paced.

"The training consists of online modules that you could go at your own pace," she said. "It included videos and self-check quizzes."

While taking the training, teachers

were given the skills that the state deemed necessary to identify students in need of help. Mr. Diederichs said there are a series of steps that staff must take after suicidal signs are displayed by students.

"We go through notification to our guidance counselor and then parent involvement right away," he said. "Then we talk to the nurse and parents and look at it, and usually if it's a case, we talk to the parents and can take it to a professional level like a

hospital."

Junior Chloe Meana was also supportive of the training.

"I think the training is a good idea for a couple reasons," she said. "First, students might feel safer if they know teachers are trained to look out for them in hard times. Second, many students will feel good knowing that in tough mental times they can go and talk to a teacher and they are trained to help."



Photo by Ally Happ

Coach Joel Diederichs walks Durant senior football player Logan Callison off the field at Wilton High School during the season opener. See a story on page 4 about Coach Diederichs who is starting his third season as Durant football coach while also serving as high school principal.

Alarming nationwide stats show need for local action

By Danielle Paulsen

When talking with a few of Durant's high school students, it was clear that some students weren't aware of the alarming national rate of suicide with teens today and also felt uncomfortable discussing it.

According to a 2017 national study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in grades 9-12, one in six students has reported a serious consideration of suicide in the past year. The CDC also said one in 14 students attempted suicide one or more times.

Some Durant students felt that more attention needs to be paid to the issue by the school.

"They did the 'Say Something' day, but that was more about school shootings," said sophomore Cooper Huston.

Another senior girl, Jordyn Ostrand, said, "I feel like they haven't tried to do anything about it."

Junior Lillian Nielsen said she remembered hearing about a student from another school committing suicide, and it was talked about at one school assembly.

"I feel like a lot of adults have problems talking about teenagers' issues," said Nielsen. Ostrand said she believes that the school doesn't address this issue more because "a lot of people want to cover up the bad things and the bad possibilities."

For the first time July 1, teachers statewide were being asked to take training from the Area Education Agencies at the beginning of the school year in suicide prevention and postvention. The Iowa Legislature has required the training to be completed annually.

Durant High School counselor Mrs. Kristy Badtram said students may not be aware of all the prevention efforts the school is making.

"We do a lot of stuff behind the scenes," said Mrs. Badtram. "We try to bring programs in to not just focus on suicide prevention, but look at each kid in a holistic view. We try to make sure we meet the needs of a student on an individual basis."

An interesting point made by Mrs. Badtram was that the whole point of having seminar was to give the students a chance to bond with one teacher and build a relationship between students and staff.

Mrs. Badtram did open up about how scary it was to deal with this issue from a school counselor's viewpoint

"Nobody wants to be responsible for somebody taking their life and as a counselor," she said, "I am bound by certain laws and ethical responsibilities that I have to make sure the student is safe."

In her 17 years working as a school counselor, Mrs. Badtram has had three students commit suicide. Those deaths really impacted her. Mrs. Badtram said she was aware that sometimes students will make meaningless jokes about hurting and/or killing themselves. However, those remarks can't be taken lightly.

"Teachers get scared when a student talks about hurting themselves even as a joke," she said. "I think nowadays you can't say that. I mean, we have to follow up on that because it's not okay to say that."

Mrs. Badtram urged students in crisis to reach out to a trusted adult at the school.

"I would hope they would have someone to talk to," she said, "whether it's a janitor, a cook, or the librarian. And if not, please please please come talk to me."

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The organization's website is suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Durant hires new SRO

By Nicole Brown

Durant High School has now hired Sergeant Mike Meier as a school resource officer (SRO) for the current school year.

Sgt. Meier is an officer with the Durant Police Department, but as long as school is in session, he will be here for an extended school day. He is part of the school team as well as a law enforcement officer.

Sgt. Meier has a large list of responsibilities under his new role at Durant High School. He can perform any law-related tasks for the school, and he will ensure the safety of the building itself by checking doors and making sure they are properly secured.

Sgt. Meier also stands near the entrance to the school and ensures the safety of students in the parking lot before and after school. His presence also does a lot to prevent reckless driving in the parking lot, which has previously been a problem at Durant.

Principal Joel Diederichs said he lobbied for the SRO new position.

"I pushed hard for it because I think safety is important," said Mr. Diederichs. "You can't guarantee anything in life but if you can have a live person here instead of a security system."

Mr. Diederichs said Sgt. Meier will also help out with cases of students being truant by visiting the homes of students who should be at school.

When interviewed, some students were concerned about the cost of the new position. Although Sgt. Meier is an employee of the city, he spends most of his time in the school. During the summer he is back out patrolling in the town. Sgt. Meier makes an annual salary of \$57,574. Durant High School

reimburses the city 75% of his total income, so the district ends up paying \$43,180 a year towards his salary.

Sgt. Meier is at Durant for two main reasons, one being the prevention of any dangerous or bad actions considering the rise in school shootings nationwide.

"They [students] don't have to worry about it with everything that's going on nowadays," said Sgt. Meier. "Not saying it can't happen, you hope it doesn't happen, but at least there is somebody here in the event that something should happen."

Sgt. Meier is also at Durant High School to build a healthy relationship with the student body. He also hopes to let students know that his door is always open, and that he would like to be approachable for students.

Despite Sgt. Meier's hope to build better relationships, senior Jordyn Ostrand said that she feels uncomfortable around the police officer.

"I always feel like he is wandering the halls, and anytime I see him, I always feel as if I am doing something wrong even though I'm not," she said. "I think that the reason for the classes he's teaching to younger kids is important, but I don't really see a reason for him just wandering the halls like he does."

Sgt. Meier said he hopes to eliminate that fear that some kids get when they see a police officer even if they are doing nothing wrong.

An important reason he is at Durant High School is to build a connection with the students and present a friendly face. Even if he is out patrolling in town, he hopes that that connection will transfer from the school year into the summer months.