Please Welcome Our New School Social Work Consultant Iris Williams

Hello, my name is Iris Williams and I am honored to serve as the new School Social Work Consultant with The University of South Florida Student Support Services Project. I received my Master's degree in Social Work from Florida State University. I am also a registered Licensed Clinical Intern with the state of Florida.

I have been a school social worker for the past 26 years in Pinellas County. During my tenure, I worked in elementary and secondary school settings where I was an active participant in our Child Study, Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and School-Based Leadership teams. I was a liaison between the school and families and conducted small groups with students and their family members. I also provided counseling as a related service, developed and implemented Functional Behavioral Assessments, Behavior Success Plans and 504 plans for struggling students and students receiving Exceptional Student Educational services. In addition, I provided professional development to teachers, administrators and Student Services staff including MTSS, Trauma-Informed Care, Cultural Competency, Crisis Intervention, Classroom Culture and various social/emotional and behavioral evidence-based practices.

I am currently the Program Manager for Project AWARE and a certified Youth Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Project AWARE is a grant which provides preventive and intervention mental health supports using a multi-tiered systems approach.

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with my fellow school social workers throughout the state of Florida. I am looking forward to supporting school social workers and families as we move to an integration model approach to Student Services. I feel the experience and knowledge I have acquired during my many years as a school social worker will provide the support needed to advance the scope of School Social Work.

Iris Williams
School Social Work Consultant,
Student Support Services Project/USF
Integrated Student Services In Schools: Action Guide

Did you know...
The Student Support Services Project team vision is a comprehensive, fully integrated multi-tiered system of supports that meets the needs of the full range of learners?

What vision is your team working toward?

If you are clear on your vision, you probably are taking steps toward making that vision a reality. We are. One development that resulted from getting clear on our vision is an online action guide for district and school student services professionals to build consensus around integrated learning supports. We hope you find this guide helpful as a starting place, or as an extension of your existing efforts to integrate student services across the disciplines and within the districtwide multi-tiered system of supports.

We look forward to using this guide in that very same way at the state level for building consensus and developing further training opportunities to build capacity for implementing integrated learning supports provided by school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and school nurses.

Want more? Click here.
http://sss.usf.edu/integrated/fissm/Action_guide.html

We hope you find our online action guide useful and we encourage you to share your stories, examples and experiences related to integrating student services.

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A School Counselor’s Perspective:  
A Tier 1 Preventive Approach at the School of Arts and Sciences

By Cathryn Lokey

The Journey

The School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) was already one of the top schools in Florida and had received national recognition as a charter school when I arrived in 2005. I walked on to a campus accented with lovely gardens, nestled among oak trees and partially hidden from the road, greeted with warm smiles from a remarkably talented and dedicated staff.

SAS had not, before this year, hired a school counselor. The new school counselor position was created in response to a crisis that had occurred the previous year. Because there was no existing counseling program, I was given a blank slate with which to design and build one that would be ideal for the school.

SAS is one of the longest running charter schools in Florida, serving students within Leon County. It is run by a board of directors made up of local, volunteer community members. The student body is built from a random lottery and is representative of the overall population of the county, with high racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic diversity. The school is dedicated to cross-curricular, project-based instruction and to developing intrinsically motivated life-long learners. The focus is on preparing the students to be high-functioning adults, not just high-functioning school children. The counseling program was built from these foundations.

Now in my 11th year at SAS, I continue to enjoy the privilege of being able to teach weekly guidance classes in every K-5 classroom, while many school counselors have sadly had their time overtaken by other demands. Regularly occurring Middle School guidance classes are more challenging to maintain, but we manage to fit classes in almost every month and longer “workshops” on early release days.

Approximately four years ago, in response to an apparent increase in the number and range of behavioral challenges that we were encountering in our classrooms, I began a search. SAS had already been routinely using response to intervention data to implement the multi-tiered system of supports for several years. We had a highly effective problem-solving team and our teachers were starting to converse and make decisions smoothly using the logic of our multi-tiered system where all instruction, interventions and supports are matched to student needs.

In the realm of academics, we were at the top of the game, and seeing fantastic results. In the realm of behavior however, we were facing a tricky challenge: How do we provide effective behavioral interventions for such a wide range of challenges, including many that result from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD)? In addition, how were we to find the time, space and available staff to deliver those interventions to the students who most needed them?

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Some of our classrooms had over 50 percent of their students presenting with some kind of behavioral challenge that was directly or indirectly affecting their academics. We realized that if we were able to find interventions that could be beneficial to all students, then we could implement those interventions preventively, at a Tier 1 level. This would let us address a variety of behaviors such as rage, defiance, withdrawal, bullying and lack of attention at the same time. The mission I was given by the team was to find interventions that had a high rate of effectiveness for as wide a range of behavioral issues as possible.

First Stop: Conscious Listening

Active listening is a common behavioral challenge in classrooms. I heard teachers complaining about it constantly and we knew from looking at the data that actively attending to instruction was a huge roadblock for many students. I noticed, as I conducted observations and taught my own classes, that many students simply did not have the skills of attending and active listening.

I remembered discussing active listening as a skill while learning about effective counseling in my graduate program and thought: Why wait until we are adults? Why not teach these skills to the children so they can benefit from them their entire lives? Their schooling would benefit. Their relationships would benefit. Over the next year I created and implemented a simple listening curriculum for the kindergarten through third grade students at our school. It consisted of teaching the students to “listen with ears, eyes and heart.” Essentially we defined and then practiced specific skills of the conscious listening skill set by engaging in activities and games focusing on auditory attention, visual attention, and understanding and empathy. I borrowed and tweaked several traditional theater games to practice specific skills following explanation and discussion. I then coached and supported the students through the process of integrating and generalizing these skills by having them practice listening exchanges with each other.

Within four to five weeks, direct, systematic observations showed that the students were more quickly engaging in active, conscious listening when prompted and were maintaining their active listening for longer periods. Teachers reported a reduction in time spent in redirection during direct instruction and a decrease in stress level during direct instruction. Because of these results, the listening curriculum is now a staple of the counseling program at SAS. “We need to teach listening in our schools... as a skill. Why is it not taught? It’s crazy!” insisted Julian Treasure on the TED Talk stage in 2011. “Wait a sec,” I thought, as I was viewing his talk online. “I teach listening as a skill in the counseling program SAS!” I sent off an email to Julian and not long after, we were having lunch in Tampa and discussing our plans for a Conscious Listening curriculum. Over the next several years, the curriculum has been molded and expanded to include lessons and activities for all ages.

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Second Stop: Heartmath

“I have something you need to try.” My friend pulled from her bag a device that looked like a cross between an old Sony Walkman and Tricorder from Star Trek. I had shared with her my concerns regarding the behavior challenges at school and had told her about our efforts to find behavioral supports for our students. The device, she explained, was called an emWave. It was developed by the Institute of Heartmath and was designed to measure something called heart rate variability. So began an ongoing and rewarding connection with an amazing body of research and a cutting-edge science and research organization.

The Institute of Heartmath was founded in 1991. It is built on the foundation of the research of neurologists and cardiologists that began to emerge in the 1970s and takes a close look at the relationship between the heart, the brain and our emotions. The organization has since generated an enormous amount of scientific data, available to view on their website, as well as software, tools and curricula that can be utilized by individuals, schools and other organizations to put the findings of the institute into practice.

The educational branch of the institute has created evidence-based curricula that comes with all materials needed to implement them immediately. At SAS, we have implemented Heartmath at the Tier 1 level through the counseling program. Through these curricula, our students have learned about the relationship between their emotional state and their ability to think and concentrate. They have learned techniques (i.e., “Shift and Shine”) for shifting their internal state from one of upset and confusion (low coherence) to one of calm and clarity (high coherence). They have learned about the power of heart-focused breathing and how to use it in stressful situations such as before an exam, during a social conflict, or in the midst of emotional difficulty. Eighty percent of teachers have reported seeing the students use the techniques “often” outside of guidance class, with positive results. Hurray for generalization!

At the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels of intervention, we have employed the emWave devices to help children who struggle with emotional regulation to learn self-regulation. Students who have practiced with the emWave devices show an increased ability to resolve emotional upset on their own. They also show an increased ability to resolve conflict with peers and to disengage from a conflict situation.

Third Stop: Meditation (a.k.a., Mindfulness and Self-Regulation)

Studying the research of the Institute of Heartmath on the results of heart-focused breathing and meditation led us to take a deeper look at the potential benefits of meditation, specifically those for children as students. The evidence that is available reporting the mental, emotional and physical benefits of meditation for adults is overwhelmingly positive. There is a substantial amount of peer-reviewed studies yielding unquestionable results. Research focused on the effects of meditation on children is not yet as extensive, but the results are promising. Among the major benefits reported are reduced anxiety, greater sense of overall well-being, increased ability to focus, improved memory, and better sleep.

It seems that there are almost as many forms of meditation as there are individuals who practice it. For our purposes at SAS (ameliorating behavioral challenges in students) transcendental meditation has been the answer. Although it may sound complex, transcendental meditation is actually quite simple. In short, it is a practice of letting the mind and body rest by gently, and without effort, focusing the mind on something simple and immediate, like the
breath. Wonderfully, it is a skill that can be learned and practiced and as a person improves in the skill, so do the benefits that are yielded from the practice.

Keeping to the themes of Heartmath, the team chose to teach all of our students to engage in extended, heart-focused meditation as a schoolwide effort. In this way, we implemented meditation as a preventive approach at the Tier 1 level. Some of the students struggle with it. Some of them can not get enough. All of them benefit, no matter their level of social, emotional and behavioral health.

Remarkably, the students who consistently respond the most positively to meditation practice—and those who report actually enjoying it the most—are those who struggle the most with attention. No matter what the root cause of their attention issues, meditation helps them all. I have seen, time and time again, students who were bouncing around the room, rolling on the floor and constantly blurting out or making noises become almost serene—quiet, still, calm, beautifully and effortlessly focused. It was, and still is, in all my time working in the school system, one of the most hopeful and inspiring things I have witnessed. Meditation is truly a simple and elegant Tier 1 solution to a multitude of school behavior issues.

Fourth Stop: Yoga


In response to a particularly wiggly year, I began including more movement in our regular guidance classes. Each guidance class was started off with a yoga-style “warm up” that included stretching, balancing and deep breathing. These warm ups had a little story that went along with them to help the children focus on what they were doing and to make it feel more like imaginative play. The response from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Currently, the students will not ever let me skip our warm up in guidance class. They look forward to moving and using their bodies in that way.

One day, while listening to NPR, I heard an interview with Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, who has been treating individuals with PTSD for over 40 years. He says that for every soldier who comes home with major trauma, there are 30 children in the United States who have it. He also says that the best current treatment we have available for PTSD is yoga. Yoga is about feeling safe in your body, says Dr. van der Kolk, and that is exactly what individuals with trauma experiences need.

I had already read and heard countless studies, discussions and talks about the wide-ranging benefits of yoga practice. That NPR story was the tipping point. We have several children in our school, as all schools do, who are diagnosed with PTSD, and many others with moderate to severe trauma experiences in their past and present lives. The symptoms they exhibit in school are restlessness, lack of attention, extreme silliness, sudden emotional outbursts, depression, learning and memory difficulties, and defiance. I knew it was time to integrate true yoga practice into Tier 1 of our system of behavioral supports, and that these supports, like all of our supports, must be integrated with academic instruction to have maximum impact on learning.

This past year I took a course titled Yoga4Classrooms and completed a certification to teach yoga to children. As with the meditation practice, the children have shown an overwhelmingly positive response to yoga. They love the challenge of the stretching and of the balance poses. They love the strength of the Warrior Poses. They love the restfulness and calm...continued
of Child's Pose. And like the meditation practice, while we can directly observe all the children benefiting from this practice in their own ways, the children we can see benefiting the very most, are those who we know are constantly battling to keep hold of their attention and emotions because of the trauma they are carrying with them.

It is still early on in implementation to be able to collect much quantitative data on the results, but the qualitative data (direct observation, student and teacher reports) is very promising. We are observing a substantial increase in academic motivation and engagement in those students with attention difficulties. We are also seeing a reduction in anxiety levels immediately following the yoga exercises in those students diagnosed with PTSD and those with school anxiety.

Soon we will be starting Tier 2 yoga intervention groups for subgroups of students with more intensive needs in all grades K-8. These students will be able to spend more time doing yoga during the day, and we will be able to more closely track the results of the intervention through more frequent data collection. The prospects are exciting.

Fifth Stop: Conscious Discipline

Conscious Discipline is an evidence-based approach created by Dr. Becky Bailey that focuses on applying the latest brain and development research to the way that we, as adults, interact with children. Several teachers at SAS have been employing Conscious Discipline since the school’s inception, but it was not until two years ago that we began the process of a schoolwide, full-scale implementation. For us, it is a way to tie together and solidify much of what we were already doing and to more broadly and deeply engage in evidence-based practices.

Conscious Discipline has mountains of indisputable research behind it. (References can be found on the Conscious Discipline website and throughout the Conscious Discipline literature.) Far more inspiring than the statistics, however, is the way the tone of our campus has changed. SAS has always been a wonderful place to work, but since Conscious Discipline has come to the forefront of our attention, our school climate has improved. There is an even higher value placed on our relationships than there was before. We are not just colleagues, teachers, staff and students. We are family. The children feel it. They feel safe, highly valued and loved. They know that our priority as caring adults is to keep them physically and emotionally safe—a higher priority than test scores. They are more compliant and learn more effectively because their brains do not have to focus on keeping them safe.

Current Trajectory

Student needs and new research addressing behavioral challenges are constantly changing, and so our program will continue to shift and change. I believe it is our responsibility as professionals who serve children to be willing to let go of the old and embrace the new—the more effective methods for a wider range of current behavioral difficulties that are presenting in our schools. The science of behavior is encouraging and full of hope. It lies with us, as educators, to apply the science and support the students at their level of need.

Because of what we now understand about the brain and human development, we know that wounds can be healed, patterns of thinking and behavior can be changed, and new skills can be learned. The solutions exist to help those students, for whom school can be a particularly challenging and frustrating experience, to finally find success. What a miraculous and wonderful journey to be a part of!
For Your Information...

In case you missed it (July 2015, Issue #18), we have included the current list of School Health Guidelines.

School Health Guidelines

Emergency Guidelines for Florida Schools (2011)

Food Allergy Guidelines (2013) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Life-Threatening Allergies Guidelines (FY 2006-07) FDOE Technical Assistance Paper

Guidelines for the Care and Delegation of Care for Students with Asthma in Florida Schools (2013)

Guidelines for the Use of Service Animals by Students with Disabilities (2015)

Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the Americans with Disabilities Act

Immunization Guidelines for Florida Schools (2013)

Individual Health Care Plans and Section 504 White Paper (2012)

Managing Students with Seizures Guidelines

Nursing Guidelines for the Care and Delegation of Care for Students with Diabetes in Florida Schools (2015)

School-Based Mental Health Resources (2015)

School Health Administrative Guidelines (2012)


Teenage Parent Programs Resource Manual

Managing Students with Seizures–The Epilepsy Foundation is now offering an online continuing education course designed to provide school nurses with information, strategies and resources to ensure a safe learning environment for students with seizures. This FREE, on-demand web course awards nurses 3.2 contact hours through the CDC Training and Continuing Education Online system at http://www.epilepsy.com/get-help/services-and-support/training-programs/managing-students-seizures-school-nurse-training.

Florida SHOTS™ Enrollment for Schools

Florida State Health Online Tracking System (SHOTS) provides access to electronically certified immunization records. Schools (public and private) and licensed child care centers may apply for view-only access to students’ immunization records at https://www.flshots.com/enrollment/school.html.

Section 504

The Section 504 Online Introductory Course (2015) has been updated at http://sss.usf.edu/resources/topic/section504/504course/index.html to align with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008, which includes students with individualized health care plans.
MyCareerShines provides a comprehensive education and career planning system featuring the program Kuder Navigator®, a developmentally appropriate online tool that helps middle and high school students learn about themselves, explore careers, build an education plan and prepare for work.

At the high school level, students can explore extended learning opportunities, postsecondary schools and financial aid information and resources. They can also receive guidance on how to develop a resume, write a cover letter, collect a list of references and more. Navigator also provides resources to help parents and educators support career exploration and education planning, set goals and track progress, and facilitate data-driven decision-making. MyCareerShines plans to launch a post-high school system, Journey, in October 2015 and a K-5 system, Galaxy, in fall 2016.

For questions regarding implementation, please email mycareershinesinfo@uwf.edu. For training questions, please email training@kuder.com or call 877-999-6227.

Upcoming Events

Florida School Counselor Association Convention

Florida Association of School Nurses Annual Conference

Florida School Health Association Annual Conference, May 4–6, 2016, Rosen Centre Hotel, Orlando. For more information visit http://fsha.net/conferences/.
What Happened?
2015 State University System of Florida Admissions Tour

The 2015 tour was a huge success with over 2,500 middle and high school counselors and other educators attending one of seven regional workshops at the state universities. At these workshops, directors explained admissions policies and procedures so that counselors can better meet the needs of their university-bound students. The participants were able to address their questions to the admissions directors from all 12 institutions at information tables before the workshop, for 30 minutes mid-morning, and during a directors panel question and answer session.

Representatives from the College Board, ACT, FDOE Division of Public Schools, and Complete Florida (MyCareerShines) provided presentations.

We are pleased to announce that the following resources from the tour are available on the Board of Governors website at http://www.flbog.edu/about/cod/asa/admissionstour.php.

◊ Powerpoints–Video Presentations
◊ State Universities Background
◊ 11 University PowerPoints
◊ Florida State University video
◊ Board of Governors Reminders
◊ SUS Administrators Directors Professional Development Topics
◊ FDOE K-12 Update
◊ College Board (focused on redesigned SAT)
◊ ACT
◊ MyCareerShines
◊ Resources
◊ Matrix (Frequently Asked Questions per institutions)
◊ Campus Matrix (University of South Florida (USF) St. Petersburg, USF Sarasota- Manatee, and University of Florida Online)
◊ First Year Campus Contacts
◊ Facts Sheets

In addition, the 2015-2016 Florida Counseling for Future Education Handbook provides school counselors and advisors with a comprehensive academic advising resource to guide students with planning for postsecondary education in Florida.

Contact: Lynda Page, Associate Director, Academic and Student Affairs
Board of Governors, State University System of Florida
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What Happened?

14th Annual Medicaid and Schools Meeting Held

The annual Medicaid and Schools meeting was held as a post-AMM meeting this year on September 17th and 18th. A Medicaid and Schools 101 session was held for district staff new to the program. Staff from the Agency for Health Care Administration provided an overview of the Florida Medicaid program and IEP services that are billable through the Medicaid Certified School Match Program. Presentations and discussion topics at the meeting included monitoring of district Medicaid claims, anticipated new rules for the Medicaid in schools program, and a methodology for districts to determine their potential for maximizing district Medicaid reimbursements through the fee-for-service (therapy, behavioral, nursing and specialized transportation services) program. Materials from the meeting, including the spreadsheet for calculating potential reimbursement, can be found on the Medicaid in schools resource topic page on our website at http://sss.usf.edu/resources/topic/medicaid/index.html.

Administrators’ Management Meeting 2015

Visit http://www.eventsforlearning.com/amm/ to view available presentations and other resources.

Educational Strategies & Student Engagement Institute

Visit Student Support Services website at http://sss.usf.edu/resources/presentations/index.html to view presentation materials—Fostering Positive School Attendance (Dr. David Wheeler). Handouts included are:

◊ Absences Add Up
◊ Fostering School Connectedness, Information for School Districts and School Administrators
◊ Fostering School Connectedness, Information for Teachers and Other School Staff
◊ Help Your Child Succeed in School: Build the Habit of Good Attendance Early
◊ Helping Your Child Feel Connected to School, Information for Parents and Families
◊ Pay Attention to Attendance: Keep Your Child On Track in Middle and High School
◊ The Power of Positive Connections — Reducing Chronic Absence through PEOPLE: Priority Early Outreach for Positive Linkages and Engagement
◊ School Connectedness (PDF Download)
Educating Schools About Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is modern day slavery. It is a global problem affecting an estimated 1.2 million children every year. This crime occurs when a trafficker uses force, fraud or coercion to control another person for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or soliciting labor or services against his/her will. Child trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring and/or receipt of a child for exploitation before the age of 18 years.

Contrary to a common assumption, human trafficking is not just a problem in other countries. Cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories. Victims of human trafficking can be male or female.

Florida is the third largest hub for human trafficking in the United States and is criminalized under both federal and Florida law. If the sex trafficking victim is under the age of 18, it is human trafficking regardless of whether force, fraud and/or coercion exist.

The need to educate students and school personnel about human trafficking is as important as the need to educate youth about safety and drugs. Trafficking can involve school-age children particularly those who are vulnerable and the numbers speak for themselves.

Since January of this year, approximately 750 calls were made to the Florida hotline to report suspected incidence of human trafficking. Nearly 200 of those calls became prosecutable human trafficking cases, and 67 of those cases involved minors.

Educators, other school/community-based professionals and parents have a critical role to play in recognizing human trafficking and in helping potential victims access specialized services. We encourage you to use these resources in the stand against human trafficking.

If you suspect an adult or child is a victim of human trafficking, please visit the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, or call them at 1-888-373-7888. If you suspect a child is a victim, please call the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.

For more information and training, please visit:

- Florida Department of Education Office of Healthy Schools - Child Human Trafficking document created in cooperation with CDC and Florida's Governor's Office.
- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign - Human Trafficking Awareness Training available for individuals, educators, law enforcement and first responders to learn the indicators of human trafficking and how you can report it.
- TOO CLOSE TO HOME: Human Trafficking in Tampa Bay Documentary.
Tips for identifying school-age victims of human trafficking

- As unexplained absences from school for a period of time (truancy)
- Demonstrates an inability to attend school on a regular basis
- Chronically runs away from home
- Makes references to frequent travel to other cities
- Exhibits bruises or other physical trauma, withdrawn behavior, depression or fear
- Lacks control over her or his schedule or identification documents
- Is hungry, malnourished or inappropriately dressed (based on weather conditions or surroundings)
- Shows signs of drug addiction
- Demonstrates a sudden change in attire, behavior or material possessions (has expensive items)
- Makes references to sexual situations that are beyond age-specific norms
- Has a “boyfriend” who is noticeably older (10+ years)
- Makes references to terminology of the commercial sex industry that are beyond age specific norms; engages in promiscuous behavior and may be labeled “fast” by peers

Trivia Questions for Your Entertainment

Q-1. What is the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008?

A-1: Federal law that prohibits discrimination

Q-2. Does the Student Support Services Project provide up-to-date Section 504 training that has been reviewed and approved for legal quality?

A-2: Yes. Please take the course at Section 504 Online Introductory Course

Q-3. What subject code is designated for credit recovery courses?

A-3: Elective

Q-4. What are the three federal laws that govern services/accommodations for students with disabilities?

A-4: 1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
      2. Section 504 and (India) 3. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Q-5. What is the federal law that stipulates conditions under which student records can be released?

A-5: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

Answers

Special note: some images provided by Thinkstock, by Getty Images.