

“We’re small enough that it doesn’t matter if it’s a middle school, high school or elementary student. It tends to be something that reaches every single building. We look at where our contacts lie and where the ripple is. Then the building teams move into action to take care of more immediate needs.”

The administrative teams at the facilities then come into play, incorporating their counseling staff.

Middle School Vice Principal Nathan Green said that his building has a designated space, such as the library, for a student to meet one-on-one with a counselor or take time to process.

This procedure is in place across the district. Even with COVID-19, there are identified spaces in each facility to allow for these care rooms.

At Siuslaw High School, “Prior to COVID, we had a care room that was set

up that we were able to utilize as a single space. Now we’ve identified multiple spaces, and multiple buildings as well, to make sure that space is available,” said Principal Garth Gerot. “The kids can stay distanced and still receive the support they need.”

It often falls on the teaching staff to alert students. They are advised to tell the facts while providing support and quelling rumors.

Gerot continued, “We’re trying to get a common message out, trying to respect the family and their wishes, so having a simple, factual statement helps those teachers prepare.”

The Siuslaw Care Team also keeps the staff members in mind.

“If (the event involves) an older student, I always try to reach out to previous teachers who might be more personally connected,” Harklerode said. “We’re also very aware of those events that might trigger a stronger response in some staff and speak to them.”

By this point, Grzeskowiak will be reaching out to neighboring school districts. He works with Mapleton Superintendent Jodi O’Mara to give correct information and provide support to her students. This is important due to the closeness of the two school districts and the many connections between students and families in western Lane County.

Through it all, staff is working to identify traumatic responses.

“We really want to keep an eye out for not just students that are directly involved, but also other individuals who have been impacted by trauma and events that happened in their lives,” Gerot said. “We want to be hyper vigilant to be making contact with the counselors, and administration as we get them in contact with resources.”

The district’s counseling staff will also be in place by this point, establishing care rooms and preparing to reach out to specific students.

Counselor Parma Roe said, “We talk about that circle of impact, moving outward from the victim, to family to best friends, peers, and then we identify students in our own buildings who might need our support. We connect with them and offer that support.”

The counselors are also in touch with the family, with one designated staff member as the contact between the district and the family involved in an incident.

“We’re just making those connections and making sure that families and students know we’re here, we’re available and we’re ready to help them,” Roe said.

The Siuslaw School District is making every effort to respond to needs of families affected by tragedy.

“These situations are very difficult for the family,” Grzeskowiak said. “We don’t overstep and issue a message outside or beyond what the family is comfortable with. In some instances, people have requested that we say nothing publicly other than, ‘If you’re going to address students, just tell them this.’”

In terms of this week’s incident, the district liaison remains in contact with the family.

“We know where they’re at right now and what’s happening. Right now, we’re giving them a little space,” Osbon said.

The district will be ready

to move forward with next steps once the family is. In the past, that involved a grief open house or a memorial, such as planting a tree or rhododendron, or honoring the life lost within the district facilities.

Later this month, Siuslaw’s counseling team is adding another element to their training through a workshop with Roger Brubaker, MPH, Sr. Community Health Analyst with Prevention Lane.

The Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) will take place locally on April 21 and 22 and includes Mapleton School District.

According to Counselor Laura Osbon, “Brubaker assists with all Lane County Schools on these kinds of issues. ... I’m very glad to have that resource because, as we all know being in Florence, we are kind of at the end of services in Lane County.”

She said that Prevention Lane also gets in contact with families affected by tragedies.

During the days after a traumatic event in the district, the counselors continue to work with staff and students and maintain the care rooms.

They use the same format when they are called to be a “flight team” for another school district. These teams of counselors and school staff provide outreach and additional support to the other school’s staff. In recent years, Siuslaw has sent a team to Reedsport and Mapleton, and both districts have been available in return.

Grzeskowiak said his role is often to be a spokesperson, which allows the other school’s administration to cope with the incident requiring the flight team. Siuslaw counselors who go end up supporting the other school’s staff where needed, including through operating a trauma room.

Counselor Allison Bitner said one of the most important aspects of this room is the log people sign when they enter.

“If we need to follow up with any students after the fact, if they’re particularly triggered, we can do so,” she

said. “We provide contact information for the suicide hotline and always put them in contact with other resources, including local resources like the Western Lane Health Network.”

The upcoming ASIST workshop will continue to equip Siuslaw staff. The school district received a grant for the training, which help with suicide intervention and screenings

According to Roe, “When kids manifest risk factors, or there are some red flags, we will be trained in giving them those screening assessments. So that grant is going to come in very valuable to us.”

Siuslaw’s counseling team looks for risk factors throughout the school year. Counselor Steve Moser said, “A lot of what we try to do is preventative, proactive measures to keep things from happening. A lot of times, we tend to be reactionary to an incident, but there are a lot of things we do from the counseling side on the preventative side of it.”

This ranges from covering topics like mental health and dating during students’ PRIDE classes to intervention methods.

One of those is the Securely notification system Siuslaw uses on every district-issued Chromebook in use during comprehensive distance learning (CDL). This program scans emails and documents to flag references to self-harm or suicide, access to websites pertaining to these topics or particularly dark-themed assignments.

“It has been a significant help to our district,” Roe said. “This system has enabled us to reach out to both students and families of students who are quietly suffering.”

Counselors are able to refer students to further assistance, including the Western Lane Health Network, a collaboration between Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts, PeaceHealth, Lane County Government and counseling services. The team also relies on teachers and aides who work directly with students.

“Teachers do a really

great job of keeping us informed if there’s an issue, like overhearing something or seeing something in a paper that just triggers an alarm for us,” Moser said.

Counselors are also available for one-on-one meetings with students who feel they need it.

For Siuslaw Special Services Director Lisa Utz, the district Care Team is part of “it takes a village to raise a child.”

“From my perspective, what is evident is we have a system, we have logistics, we have ways to do things, we have all of the different responses and everything. The key piece here is all of these people are human,” she said. “Everybody responding to this crisis is human. So that’s why there is this beauty of a village doing this, and the interconnectedness of all of us helping each other out at this time. ... It is nice to know that we’re all in each other’s hands, and we’re all in good hands.”

It helps in the regular school year and has been even more important in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Care Team responds even when students aren’t on campus, such as during summer break or when the students are in CDL.

Typically, the team responds one to three times a year, both in district and as a flight team.

“If someone makes a call and says they need help — you roll out,” Grzeskowiak said. “And sometimes we make that call too. It just happens.”

“Unfortunately, we’ve had to do this too many

times, for too many things.”

During Thursday’s meeting, the team encouraged people to get help before it got to crisis level.

Gerot said, “It’s really important to note, especially going through this year of COVID, there are a lot of people hurting out there. It’s important — for students, parents or anyone with concerns — to bring them to someone that can act on it. The more we talk about those things, we don’t let them go unnoticed or unidentified. It is critical that we’re talking to them that we’re helping to support people in our community across the board.”

District policy is to direct students and families towards professional help, Grzeskowiak said, with the district as just one of those options.

“If somebody is struggling, don’t shrug it off and hear them the right way,” he pleaded. “Steer them to somebody that can help them make that contact and make that report, because if you don’t, the tragedy that ensues from that is going to stick. That’s going to haunt people. And we don’t want that either.”

He continued, “In the case of a mental health crisis, it is important for students and adults across the board. And that’s what we’re trying to push people towards. Go to the suicide hotline, go to your local doctor, even go to the emergency room. We’re making sure that people get helped beyond what we can do for the immediate stop-gap piece.”

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BOTH MEETINGS ARE CURRENTLY ON HOLD. WATCH SIUSLAW NEWS FOR RESUMPTION

- Tuesday Evening Group (2nd Tuesday) 5-7 p.m. - Ichiban Chinese/Japanese Restaurant
- Urologist Dr. Bryan Melhaff attends.
- Tuesday Lunch Group (3rd Tuesday) 12 noon - 1:00 p.m. - Ichiban Chinese/Japanese Restaurant
- Urologist Dr. Roger McKimmy attends.

Contact Bob for more information:
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