

**Gallatin County Mental Health Services**

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**Brian Brentlinger- Mental Health Specialist**

**Mental Health Needs due to Covid-19 pandemic**

Over the past 10 months Covid-19 has had a negative impact on our students, families and staff. The pandemic has led to months of isolation, fear of the unknown, new traumatic events as well as exacerbating existing mental health conditions.

In addition to Covid-19, Gallatin County Schools lost a mental health clinician here in our district. Lisa Wilson died in December of 2020. Lisa worked full-time in the district even though she was only paid by the district part-time. Lisa worked primarily in the middle school seeing clients as well as working with school staff and admin with student concerns related to mental health. Lisa’s situation was rare and was hugely beneficial to our school district. She would work with students who had Medicaid insurance. She would bill Medicaid for services rendered to these students and the school district would then pay her for her work outside of her billable hours. This arrangement allowed us to have Lisa in the school full-time while students were in session.

As we are starting to see students come back to school and in our buildings regularly, we are seeing the negative impact of Covid-19 first-hand. We are seeing anxiety levels and symptomology directly related to anxiety skyrocket in our students, families and staff. We are seeing students and families who are dealing with a great amount of fear, triggering mental health concerns. We are seeing students who have been in isolation for an extended period show signs and symptoms of depression. We are seeing an increase in students who have started or increased their use of alcohol and/or drugs. In addition, we are also seeing students who have been exposed to numerous traumatic events over the last 10 months.

In response to all the above-mentioned items, we are requesting the school district to consider hiring a district School Social Worker. The school district currently has one full-time Mental Health Specialist operating out of the high school serving the entire district. With the loss of Lisa Wilson who had an office in the middle school, we are requesting to hire the additional staff member to operate out of the middle school and serve the entire district.

The school district has been working with KY ABRI to help develop a MTSS model for both educational and mental health needs. With hiring a School Social Worker, they would be able to focus on the bottom tiers of our MTSS model for mental health needs. I am currently spending some time on the first level, and more time on the top two levels. We need more work with our Universal and Targeted interventions with students. A school social worker will be able to meet those needs.