

Published September 18th, 2019

MEF supports student wellness on school campuses

By Jenn Freedman



Campolindo's Wellness Center Photos DeF-Stop Photography

Most Moraga residents are aware that grants from the Moraga Education Foundation supplement state funding to ensure that Moraga schools can provide a high-quality, well-rounded education by using these grants to fund areas like art, music, physical education, librarians, and teacher aides. But the community may not be aware of other vital benefits of MEF donations—specifically, that Moraga schools use some of the MEF grants to fund initiatives in wellness and social/emotional learning.

Student wellness has become a larger focus in recent years in both districts (Moraga School District and at Campolindo High School through the Acalanes Union High School District) as research shows its importance on the academic learning of students. Both districts have used Stanford University's Challenge Success research and student surveys to help direct their focus.

MEF granted \$2.425 million to MSD and Campolindo for the 2019-20 school year. The MSD is using some of those funds to pay for an elementary school counselor (in its second year), two intermediate school counselors, student support services, and staff development for student wellness. Staff development is focused on identifying and assisting students who may need additional social and emotional support.

Elementary school counselor Bess Inzeo taught over 375 classroom lessons on empathy, emotion management, and problem solving last school year. She also meets with individual students and small groups that need solution-focused counseling in areas like mindfulness, social skills, and anxiety. "These skills transfer back into the classroom, where they are now able to have better relationship skills, self-awareness, and social awareness," she explains.

At Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, MEF supports school counselor Gaby Alvarez and student support worker Annette Herbert, who both provide individual social/emotional counseling. JM offers various wellness programs like diversity/inclusion curriculum, social media safety lessons, and social clubs (mental health, kindness, and diversity). Gaby also runs the new Wellness Center, a place for students to take a break and regulate so they can go back to class. Principal Joan Danilson is grateful for the support around wellness: "Social/emotional learning is so at the forefront of what we need to be doing right now in this stressful, emotional world."

Campolindo High School is using some of the MEF funds to pay for staffing and services at the Wellness Center on campus, which opened in April 2018 (AUHSD has phased in wellness centers at all four high schools). This year, in addition to providing immediate support to students in crisis, the center is offering more opportunities for students to connect with their community of peers and relieve stress and anxiety through support groups (focusing on LGBTQ, body image, and stress), mindfulness classes, art activities, college and career counselor classes, and support to seniors transitioning to college. Campolindo is also working to increase awareness of the center and make it easier for students, staff, and parents to request an appointment for a student.

Last year the Wellness Center served about 30% of the school population and had almost 2,200 check-ins (including repeat visits). This year, their goal is to connect with 50% of the student body.

Principal John Walker highlights, "High school can be a stressful time for teenagers and Campolindo is so fortunate to have the Wellness Center to support the students. The Wellness Center staff helps students manage a wide range of issues, from everyday stressors to situations that require ongoing support."

Kristen O'Meara, Wellness Center coordinator, adds, "By offering a confidential and safe space, and support services like individual and group counseling, not only do we support the students' emotional and social needs, but we connect them back to the classroom to engage in academic learning."

By focusing on the emotional life of students, schools are also trying to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

MEF's annual Day of Giving is this week, on Wednesday, Sept. 18. To donate, go to www.moragaeducation.org.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA