



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HARFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO PILOT HANDLE WITH CARE PROGRAM AT JOPPATOWNE AREA SCHOOLS

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS), the Harford County Sheriff's Office, and the Harford County Child Advocacy Center have collaborated to launch a Handle With Care pilot program in the Joppatowne area for the 2018-19 school year.

The Handle With Care program promotes a school-community partnership aimed at ensuring that children who are exposed to trauma in their home or community receive appropriate interventions to help them heal and thrive to the best of their ability, despite the traumatic circumstances they experienced. The ultimate goal of the program is to help students to succeed in school.

"We are very excited to begin this program here in Harford County," said HCPS Director of Student Services Bernard Hennigan. "This program will provide the staff in the pilot schools with a unique opportunity to have more insight into the lives of their students and assist them as needed. It will also give them a greater sense of the realities that some students face in their lives. We truly appreciate and value this partnership with the Harford County Sheriff's Office to institute a program that directly impacts the lives of our students."

As part of the pilot program, school staff will be notified when one of their students is involved in or is witness to a traumatic event. When a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, a confidential message will be sent from law enforcement to the child's school before the start of the next school day, alerting staff to "handle the student with care." The notice from law enforcement will not include details of the incident; however, school staff will then know to be especially attentive to the child's needs and sensitive to his/her circumstances outside of school.

Through this program, HCPS staff will also gain a better awareness and understanding of the different Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) that students face during their time away from school.

The Handle With Care model HCPS is replicating was originally developed and implemented in West Virginia.

Examples of the types of incidents that may generate a Handle With Care notice include the arrest of household member, a drug/alcohol overdose of a family member, the death/suicide of a family member, an incident of domestic violence, or devastating loss such as a house fire.

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“When a child suffers a trauma, it is all of our responsibility to rally around that young life and provide support as they navigate that crisis,” said Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler. “Handle With Care realizes that they cannot do it alone, and should not have to do it alone. When organizations come together to respond to the needs of our children, our most vulnerable population, it is the true meaning of community. I am pleased to be able to partner with HCPS on this important initiative.”

The pilot program will be in place in the following schools for the 2018-19 school year: Joppatowne High School, Magnolia Middle School, Joppatowne Elementary School, Riverside Elementary School, Magnolia Elementary School, and Edgewood Elementary School.

The schools selected for this pilot program are part of a feeder system of schools, so in cases where there are multiple children in a family, each child’s school will be notified.

Following this pilot year, an evaluation of the volume of calls will help determine what resources will be needed to extend the program to other schools within HCPS.

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