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OPS partnering with WKU for mental health services

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer
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Matthew Constant

With a \$1.92 million federal grant, Western Kentucky University will be providing paid stipends to counseling interns who will work directly with students in rural communities and districts in the state, including Owensboro Public Schools.

Matthew Constant, OPS superintendent, said this partnership is still in the beginning stages, but it is his understanding it will help to “build a bench” of mental health professionals in this area.

Having the ability to work in the field, or in a school, with students receiving mental health services will be beneficial for the interns, and for students, Constant said.

“This will provide some paid interns to schools and districts,” he said. “By doing that model, that builds a solid future because the intern gets to see the real world, what it’s like in schools.”

OPS, like most other districts who are the recipients of federal funding throughout the pandemic, has been devoting a lot of time, energy, and money to mental and social emotional services for students, their families, and staff members.

“The landscape of educating kids in 2021 and what we’ve learned through a pandemic has resulted in a prioritization of social emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and the extreme need for one-on-one counseling of kids and families,” Constant said. “The grant will empower us and build the future counseling bench which is critical to educating the whole child.”

Further details about when interns will be expected to be placed in school systems are forthcoming, Constant said.

WKU is slated to receive \$480,000 a year for four years, beginning July 1. The grant is from the Health Resources and Services Administration, and was given to 56 recipients as part of the Behavioral Health Workforce and Education Training Program for Professionals, according to a release sent by the college.

Corrine Murphy, dean of WKU’s College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, said in the release that this award will be an “enormous benefit” for the college, but also the region at large.

“The grant provides \$10,000 stipends for up to 29 interns each year for the next four years, site supervisor stipends, as well as funds for inter professional training and faculty professional development largely focused on serving the needs of our rural communities,” Murphy said. “The funding will significantly and positively impact our ability to recruit, retain and support our students as they grow into counseling professionals.”

The release indicates three primary goals for the grant program: maintain and expand the relationships with community-based partners to increase the number of qualified counseling internship training sites in high need areas; increase the number of qualified graduate counselors interested in serving high need areas to meet the demands of rural and partially rural diverse communities; and expand and promote inter professional collaborative behavioral health trainings in behavioral health and primary care settings.

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