

## Thoughts on Leadership from SSHS Project Directors - Beth

- Jean: I'd like to give a warm welcome to Beth Herman of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Beth has served as the state's safe schools, healthy students project coordinator, and she supports the work of lead education agencies in the diverse and underserved communities of Beloit, Racine and Menomonie. Hi Beth.
- Beth: Hi, Jean.
- Jean: Wisconsin's safe schools healthy students initiative has seen some really impressive outcomes at the local level. We've seen significant decreases in the number of students who have experienced bullying or report involvement in physical fights and you've seen less alcohol consumption among high school students and in just one year your state trained 2,000 people to support the social, emotional and behavioral health of students, and these are real measures of success. So I'm wondering how do you measure your own success as a state project director? What have been your own metrics, so to speak, over the past four years?
- Beth: I always find that question interesting because I am a bit of a data geek myself, but my metrics are a little bit less numbers. So for example, as most people probably know Wisconsin is a local controlled state and probably the most far definition of what that means. I learned pretty early on that each of these communities that I was working with had a pretty good handle on what they needed and my job was to support when necessary and get out of the way when necessary. I think that the number that you see, those outcomes that you see really have so much to do with the fact that the local district determined what they were going to focus on and the best ways to reach those numbers. So the tail is partially in those numbers, but it's also in the fact that we're seeing Beloit and Menomonie each did different things in order to reach those numbers and they chose interventions that would work for them.
- Jean: How did the state play a role in helping each of those local communities choose the evidence based programs or services that we're going to be right for them?
- Beth: So at the state level here, our department is, at least our team anyway, isn't really involved in monitoring. We're involved in providing technical assistance and trainings, and so what we would do with each of those communities is provide options. Menomonie, for example, found much of their own on their own simply because they were looking for interventions and programs that would be culturally relevant for them. At the state level, what that does then is it's almost a reverse piece for us. We take what Menomonie learned or what Menomonie found and then we can share that with other like-minded communities. So, we provided some training in some cases because we're talking about a lot of different interventions. We're talking about AOD interventions and social emotional learning and family engagement, all those different five areas.
- Beth: We provided support through resources and training for screening for young children and for the pyramid model for social emotional learning in young children. We would make connections for these different communities to other communities that have been doing the work and found some success. It's not a metric so much as it is a visual for myself, but I see myself working at the state level as like the hub of a wheel. I gather the spokes or the information coming from the different local communities and going back

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out to those local communities and kind of making sure that the districts that we were working with in this project had connections, had support that they needed to do some of that work. Some of the districts required a little bit or asked for a little bit more assistance in identifying resources and others were able to locate some on their own.

Jean: Beth, I really love that image of seeing yourself as the hub of that wheel with spokes coming in and out so that this, the work in Wisconsin between local lead education agencies, communities and school districts, and the state is really two way. It's not just the state pushing information out, but you're also taking in a lot of information from every one of those local communities so you can be supplying or finding the best possible technical assistance that you can.

Beth: Absolutely.

Jean: So looking down the road, I know that your office is helping to expand school based mental health to schools across the state. Now, how do you take those local successes and translate them to state level policy makers and legislators? How do you tell that story to impact policy and systems?

Beth: So I think it actually starts by making multiple stories one story. So by that I mean is as you may be aware that we also receive funding through Climate Transformation and the AWARE project and so with the safe schools, healthy students, we have three local labs if you will, in our communities. If we also pull in all the work that we're doing at AWARE, we now have six and if we also pull in all the work that we're doing at Climate Transformation, we have even more and these are all local lab communities that has been doing work in mental health, and I'd say that broadly because it can be AODA issues. It can be social emotional learning, it can be trauma informed care. I mean there's all these different things that fall under the umbrella of school mental health, and by creating a big group of local labs, we have more to take to the community.

Beth: For us I think where it really started was taking it internally in our agency. So for example, as these things started to show promise and started to show the outcomes that you mentioned at the beginning, these were things that our team and then our supervisors and then our division managers worked all the way up to getting that information to the state superintendent and through getting the support of the state superintendent, we were also able then to increase communication sorts of pieces. So for example, doing videos of good practice in mental health and social emotional learning, really well done, beautiful videos from our education team here who then we can put those online and share those. Taking the information to legislators, getting different advocacy groups who wanted to support this work to work with us.

Beth: So as state employees we can't advocate and we can't lobby. So we needed to get the information about the needs that we had in the state and the successes that different communities had had to different stakeholders that could support us in that work. It's really hard at this point to pin down exactly what happened. I would say one of the things that had a huge impact was, again, the Gannett news series that started to take a look at a student mental health and the really, really challenging things that schools and communities we're dealing with and multiple suicides and just all sorts of emotion and

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data both together around that and the newspaper series did some town hall meetings and that really started to generate, not just coming from us but coming from grassroots, from families, from schools, educators, administrators about we need more supports for this.

Beth: We utilized that as it was happening to sort of say, "We agree and here's some resources, here's some things that we know people are doing." So with the help of all of those different little things that fell into place and a superintendent, state superintendent that really supported the work, we were able to receive funding because it was requested through our state biennial budget, the last budget go around to support mental health in schools, and we received money for training. We received the money to support increased social work time and buildings and then we also received money for a competitive grant process. We received from the state, 3.25 million to provide to local school districts through a competitive grant process. We received applications requesting well over eight million.

Beth: So that is a data point, that is a communication point that we're now using to go back out and say, "The needs are greater than we've allocated funding for and are now requesting more funds for the next biennium budget." So there have been a number of different ways. If I just sum it up, it's utilizing stakeholders, it's taking successes and making sure that people internally in our department know and those stakeholders know. It's utilizing the momentum that's being produced by families and communities across the state because of the challenges, and then it's just being ready with support and resources so that when schools in districts and those stakeholders start to push things forward that you're ready to roll. With those three grant projects that we had and the number of different local labs that we had, we were ready to take on that challenge.

Jean: Beth, congratulations. Not just on the successes you've seen on the ground with safe schools, healthy students initiatives but on creating that momentum, building on that momentum, having the resources ready and in place, and of course on getting the start of a substantive commitment from the state to make sure that these needed services are available to students across Wisconsin. I can't thank you enough for your time today. Really appreciate your leadership with this grant. Thank you so much, Beth.

Beth: You're welcome.