To: Bob Hurlbut

Ellison Foundation

From: Laura Petrie, Teacher

 Denny International Middle School

RE : 2018 Ellison Foundation Grant Reflection

As part of our school’s race and equity focus, our C-SIP goals, and to reduce the achievement gap within our school population Denny International Middle School made the decision to focus on the social emotional aspects of our students. As a title 1 school, Denny’s population consists of students at-risk due to poverty, past-trauma, and immigration concerns. In the school year 2017-18 Denny chose to include, in our professional development, youth mental health.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or is in crisis.  Youth Mental Health First Aid is primarily designed for adults who regularly interact with young people.  The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.  Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders.

Denny’s training goals:

1. Build awareness to reduce the stigma associated with mental health
2. Train and certify every adult at DIMS in the Mental Health First Aid curriculum
3. Support Race and Equity with their work towards reducing the achievement gap
4. Provide professional development that will immediately impact our students & staff in a positive way

The Ellison Foundation grant afforded us the opportunity to send one staff member to the Mental Health First Aid Trainers course over the summer. This allowed us to hold the trainings in house within our school calendar without taking teachers out of the classroom or needing additional funds to cover release days. The grant also provided funding for us to purchase participant manuals, which continue to be used as a resource.

The Mental Health First Aid course is designed as a small facilitated discussion with a maximum of 30 participants. The curriculum is thought provoking, sometimes personal, and is best delivered in a small group. We were able to manage this small group training with the help of our administration. We exchanged a Friday professional development day for a different Saturday, used the day between semesters, and held trainings on Saturdays. We could accommodate almost every schedule issue imaginable with collaboration and teamwork.

We trained 113 Denny teachers, administrators and support staff during the 2017-2018 school year. This included our City Year volunteers, health center personnel, instructional aids, and office staff. We trained 12 CTE high school teachers. We also trained several nurses, parents, and community members and held a training at Challenger Elementary School in Everett. Every participant received the training and a participant reference book.

Teachers and staff at Denny are better prepared to handle a mental health issue that they may be faced with inside and outside the classroom. They are able to identify signs and symptoms of mental health problems in youth. They have the tools to support students and connect them to professionals that can provide the best help. The adults at Denny realize the importance of building relationships with students that will create an environment of support for students struggling with mental health problems.

The Ellison Foundation Grant allowed the opportunity for the Denny staff to review and focus on our organizational policy and procedures with regards to student referrals. The additional training highlighted the support staff and individuals in our building who may be unknown to some. It opened the conversation as to what do we do when given a certain situation. We have educated our staff on the positions within our organization who can help, how to best contact those individuals and what steps should be taken when addressing the unique needs of a student’s mental health.

Ultimately, we accomplished a great feat. Not only in training the Mental Health First Aid curriculum, but also in reducing the stigma associated with mental health within our building. Our teachers and staff have the curriculum, the ability to collaborate, and the compassion to help our youth in need. We have collectively more than doubled the number of referrals for mental health services this year alone. Our staff is communicating and connecting students to care coordinators to receive the mental health services they need to grow and develop.

Community partners, like the Ellison Foundation, provide opportunities for schools to think outside the school day. The funding of this project was made possible by this grant. On behalf of the entire Denny International Middle School community I would like to thank the Ellison Foundation for believing that we can and do make a difference. Thank you for being our partner! Go Dolphins!