

WHERE IS

Students are struggling throughout the whole school year. When is it time for us to receive help?

I

felt overwhelmed, drained, unmotivated, and just at a loss for hope. I didn't have anyone there to help me. My teachers tried, but they weren't trained to help me deal with the issues I was facing. This year, my motivation is low. This summer was hard for me, still having no one to confide in. I could have benefited from in-school therapy last year. This year I would benefit from it even more. It doesn't help that I have been on the waiting list for two years, even having to be re-added at one point.

Did you know East High School has one in-building therapist? Only one. In a school with over 2,000 kids. I am sure not all kids need a therapist, but what about the ones that do? Do we just sit on a waiting list until we graduate? Many students have supportive teachers and staff, but waiting for help but they do not have time to sit down for an hour and be able to give their full attention to one student. Teachers and staff are

not trained to help students cope or diagnose mental health issues or submit referrals to outside agencies necessary for students. Teachers cannot coordinate and facilitate groups for students, such as for improving social skills or addressing behavioral challenges, as a school therapist is trained to do. In no way am I trying to bash the staff here at East High, it is just the lack of support that is provided by the Des Moines Public School district when it comes to staffing therapists.

I do not want to pity myself. I just want help and support for the students here at East High and all over in the Des Moines Public School District.

According to a statement made by the Des Moines Public Schools, "Students around the nation face many issues on a routine basis, which interfere with their academic and individual success. Family and peer conflicts, problems adjusting to life stressors, academic stress, emotional and mental health concerns, as well as substance abuse are examples of the challenges facing our students and families. In addition, 20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition, with approximately 50% of students >14 with a mental illness that drop out of high school. Lastly, latest

Opinion/ L. Thomas

research reports suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-14. We push and push for students to go to class, to be on time, and to get good grades. But the first instinct is to punish or call home when these expectations aren't met by the school."

Why can't students be checked on first? Ask what's going on? Ask what you could do to help? Offer in school therapy if needed. Don't go straight to sending someone home or punishing them. What if that's where someone's struggles are coming from? No one really dives deeper into students' actions.

The solution is not easy. There is a systematic issue throughout the whole school. Teachers do not have enough time to have one on one time with students to notice something wrong. The teachers must be the ones who reach out to the counselors because they each have about 350+ kids and they are stuck in their office most times. Yes, students can reach out to their counselors, but half of the kids have never even met, seen, or even heard from their counselors before. It's odd to just reach out to someone you don't have a relationship with to ask for help. There have been times I have reached out I didn't get a response. I'm not blaming them though. The counselors always have a heavy load of work.

A possible solution that I think could have an impact is virtual therapy. It

THE SUPPORT?

is not a one on one in person connection, but I believe at least being able to vent and release to a therapist that can give students professional and honest help will help release some of the mental struggles or stress going on. Virtual therapy can be a phone call or a zoom meeting. If students have a release or study hall period, they can go to one of the conference rooms in the school and do their therapy appointment. There are even a few teachers that do their virtual therapy in school during their planning period or after school in their classrooms or even at home. One teacher being Keely Conner, an English teacher here at East High School.

“I started doing therapy a couple of years ago in person, but then my schedule made it too difficult to get to the office, so I switched to virtual therapy (telehealth) with the same therapist. For me, they were really the same. I got all the same benefits from virtual therapy that I did from in-person therapy. Virtual just took away the stress of having to go somewhere. I would do it after work in my classroom or my car,” Conner said.

I believe that adding virtual therapy can make a big impact. As a district we strive to make students better and do well in school. But the real issue is the lack of support throughout the whole district. Mental health has a substantial impact on many students and needs attention.



*2000+ students
at East High School.*

94 teachers at East High School

6 counselors at East High School

1 therapist at East High School

**Illustration/ L.
Thomas**

*Ever since the COVID-19
pandemic school funding
went down, we have lost
several staff making it even
harder for students as the
class sizes have continued to
increase.*