

# Local schools receive \$3.85M to bolster counseling services

- JULIE CROTHERS BEER THE GOSHEN NEWS

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GOSHEN — Eight local school corporations will benefit from a combined \$3.85 million in grant funding earmarked to bolster counseling services for students in kindergarten through grade 12.

The grants — ranging from \$68,312 to \$2.87 million — are part of the Lilly Endowment's Comprehensive Counseling Initiative for Indiana K-12 Students, a five-year program that launched in September 2016. According to a news release from the organization, the initiative is designed to encourage the state's public and charter schools to develop counseling models that address the academic, college, career, social and emotional needs of students.

"A large majority of the proposals noted that schools are overwhelmed by the social and emotional challenges their students face, which they indicated have worsened in recent years because of the opioid addiction crisis affecting Indiana communities," Lilly officials wrote in a news release. "They report that too often counselors don't have the time they need for academic and college and career advising because they must address their students' urgent social and emotional challenges."

That's certainly a problem that counselors at local school corporations are experiencing, said Steve Thalheimer, superintendent of Fairfield Community Schools and chairman of the local effort to secure grant funding for Elkhart County schools.

“Many of our counselors feel like they are constantly doing triage with students who are in crisis,” Thalheimer said. Students have a variety of needs and it is a challenge for counselors to be able to serve so many students at once, he explained.

Last fall, Lilly announced plans to set aside \$22 million for implementation grants for Hoosier schools seeking ways to improve their counseling programs, beginning with a planning grant. Leaders of several local schools applied and received planning grants. Fairfield was among them.

As individual teams began meeting to discuss counseling needs and word reached others in the county, school officials realized the "triage" issue was a common concern among the county's nearly 60 school counselors, Thalheimer said.

“We took a look at what we do well and what we need help with,” he said. “And we found that so many students have needs like these that within their counseling offices, they can't provide all of the services that the kids need.”

Superintendent Diane Woodworth said the greatest challenge Goshen Community Schools faces is the ratio of students to school counselors.

"... Hopefully the grant can help us learn more about how to assist more students with the current counseling staff by employing additional strategies," she said.

As part of the process, Lilly also offered the opportunity for school districts to collaborate and file a joint implementation proposal. With the help of the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis, the Elkhart County Collaborative Program was formed to include representatives from Baugo, Concord, Elkhart, Fairfield, Goshen, Middlebury and Wa-Nee

community schools. West Noble School Corporation in Noble County also submitted a proposal.

In May 2017, 254 school corporations and charter schools submitted implementation grant proposals totaling nearly \$90 million, Lilly officials said.

“The response from school corporations and charter schools far exceeded the Endowment’s expectations,” said Sara B. Cobb, the Endowment’s vice president for education. “We believe that this response demonstrates a growing awareness that enhanced and expanded counseling programs are urgently needed to address the academic, college, career, and social and emotional counseling needs of Indiana’s K-12 students. We were most pleased to see how the schools engaged a wide variety of community stakeholders in assessing their students’ counseling needs and developing strategies to address them.”

## **PLAN FORMED**

During discussions about community needs, Elkhart County school leaders settled on three areas of focus: social and emotional health, college and career readiness and optimizing the use of school counselors already in their ranks.

They studied counseling programs at schools as close as Wabash and as far away as Pharr, Texas, and attended workshops to learn more about the options, Thalheimer said.

"Going through all of those workshops and investigating best practices allowed us to see places where things were working well and create a model based off of that," he said.

One key component of the program is training with Dr. Trish Hatch, a consultant and author of more than 50 publications on the topic of school counseling. Her training model teaches counselors to look at the services they are providing

students on every level and then use student data to drive results, Thalheimer said.

"Counselors resoundingly were keen on what she was saying," he said.

"Counselors who attended those workshops came back and talked about it and got other counselors excited."

Another part of the local effort will include adding positions to school corporations in need of a dean or student adviser, providing curriculum and supplies, and other related training for counselors, according to Thalheimer.

"In some districts, they'll be bringing in someone to oversee college and career readiness so the counselors that are in place have more time to manage the students they have," he said.

Each of the seven Elkhart County school districts received funding based on student enrollment. Budgets were set at \$100 per student enrolled as of the spring 2016 semester. The grant funding ranges from \$187,800 at Baugo Community Schools to \$1,277,000 at Elkhart Community Schools.

Thalheimer said local school officials will meet in late October to continue working toward full implementation of the plan.

Horizon Education Alliance, a nonprofit that researches and supports education initiatives in Elkhart County, will manage the logistics of training.

Due to the significant number of implementation grant proposals received by Lilly in the first round, a second batch of grants will be made available, officials said. Up to \$10 million in grants will be available, and any Indiana public school corporation or charter school that did not receive an implementation grant in the first round of the Counseling Initiative will be eligible to apply.

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## **GRANT RECIPIENTS**

The following is a list of local school corporations that were selected to receive implementation grants in the Comprehensive Counseling Initiative for Hoosier students.

### **Elkhart County**

Baugo Community Schools — \$187,800

Concord Community Schools — \$533,400

Elkhart Community Schools — \$1,277,000

Fairfield Community Schools — \$211,075

Goshen Community Schools — \$654,753

Middlebury Community Schools — \$452,904

Wa-Nee Community Schools — \$298,644

### **Noble County**

West Noble School Corporation — \$236,900