A Crisis in the Classroom

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West Virginia has the highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the country (CDC, 2017).

Many people in active addiction are also parents.

Little is known about what teachers are experiencing in the midst of the opioid epidemic.

Some students see drug addiction as a normal way of life. It is hard to steer students towards a brighter future of learning when the new “normal” is living in the midst of an opioid epidemic where education is not valued. Some students are so fixated on “survival” that learning is not a priority for them.

What are WV public school teachers’ experiences with the opioid epidemic in their classrooms?

What Did We Do?

~2,600 Total number of teachers who responded
86% Female
49% Elementary teachers
17% Special education teachers
62% Have more than 10 years of teaching experience
55% Have a master’s degree with additional certificates

Who are the Teachers?

What Is Happening in the Classrooms?

76% reported that suppressing anger was an extremely common behavior in their classrooms, but only 20% felt extremely equipped to handle it.

68% reported that low motivation to achieve was an extremely common behavior in their classrooms, but only 16% felt extremely equipped to handle it.

Over 70% reported an increase in students impacted by substance abuse in the home.

75% reported feeling somewhat or not at all equipped to interact with a parent or caregiver who has an addiction.

49% indicated their community was impacted more by the opioid epidemic compared to neighboring communities.

35% of teachers reported they feel frequently or always “burnt out”

Why Do Teachers Need Additional Training and Support?

90% reported feeling less than very confident supporting children with parents/caregivers who use substances.

90% of teachers rely on colleagues for support.

72% of teachers have not received training on working with children affected by addiction.

54% of teachers have little to no knowledge regarding addiction.

It is stressful to feel like I have to be ‘all things to all people.’ Teachers are trained to teach, not be social workers or counselors. But the things some students are dealing with demand so much more than simple teaching.

Recommendations

Training

• Develop a training module for teachers that includes:
  • Understanding addiction
  • Effects of addiction on family systems & parent interaction strategies
  • Classroom strategies for working with children from addicted homes

Support

• Establish a peer-support structure for teachers.
  Options include:
  • A buddy system approach with teachers who are trained together
  • A mentoring system
  • Regular, facilitated meetings to discuss experiences and strategies

Resources

• Provide concrete resources to teachers, including:
  • HELP4WV cards
  • Information about Al-Anon and Nar-Anon groups
  • National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA) Kit for Educators

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