

My name is Joel Brown and I am advocating for 10.3 billion for public education, so that we can keep social workers in schools. I am currently a social worker at Aloha High School.

So far at Aloha this year, we have completed 59 suicide screenings and safety plans.

We currently have nearly 200 students receiving McKinney Vento Services (houseless support), and expect those numbers to climb as post-pandemic emergency services, and extended relief policies come to an end.

Our students are struggling to meet their basic needs, and struggling to stay alive.

When mental health needs go unaddressed, we see an increase in suicide. We see an increase in substance use, violence, and school absences.

In 2022 there were more school shootings than ever before. Our society is finally beginning to portray the problem accurately - a consequence of mental and emotional distress. What sense does it make to remove mental health supports at a time like this?

We need social workers in schools to help remove barriers to education. We are trained in emotional first aid, crisis response protocols, and have vast knowledge of community resources to help students and families meet their needs. We provide perspective on behaviors that are often misunderstood and mistreated, advocating for transformative and healing interventions over punitive ones. We chip away at the school to prison pipeline.

We can not rely on contracting out to community agencies for mental health support. Community partners can not respond to emergencies, and remain isolated from the school community, and wellness teams. Additionally, therapy as a sole intervention is insufficient. School social workers provide much more than mental health support. We connect families with housing resources, and other basic needs. We assist families facing deportation. We distribute food, and clothing, and coordinate holiday sharing efforts. We are in classrooms delivering social and emotional learning curriculum, and assist in the delivery of professional development.

Shifting resources to focus on college preparedness while cutting social supports will surely increase gaps in achievement. We can not expect to improve learning outcomes, while cutting the services intended to remove barriers to learning. Those that are well resourced will continue to soar, while many others will fall through the cracks.

We are just getting started, and we are seeing results. We love our jobs because we can see change occurring right in front of our eyes. We have a lot more work to do.

Sincerely,

Joel Brown

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