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Arlington Education Foundation Invests \$200,000 in Behavioral Health
300 Arlington Public School Staff will be trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid

The Arlington Education Foundation (AEF) has committed to awarding \$200,000 over the next three years to support the Arlington Public Schools' Safe and Supportive Schools initiative to create a comprehensive behavioral health program for the district. Behavioral health is intricately connected to academic, social and emotional success at school, and is one of the district's top goals for fiscal year 2018.

According to mentalhealth.gov, half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old (i.e. anxiety and eating disorders), and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24 (i.e. substance abuse). During the first year of their partnership, AEF has awarded the Arlington Public Schools a District Investment Grant of \$100,485 to fund Youth Mental Health First Aid training for three hundred staff to learn how to spot the early warning signs and the steps they can take for early intervention. The grant will also fund ongoing work on Safe and Supportive Schools action plans for each school.

Mental health has long been viewed as an illness, or something that needs to be cured; yet it is just as important as physical health. Mental health is how we live, love and laugh. It helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveys at Arlington High School and the Ottoson Middle School show that mental health issues stress, low self-esteem, self-harm, sexual abuse and suicide contemplation/attempts are on the rise in our youth community.

"We need to overcome the stigma of mental health and the 'that's not my kid' mentality", remarks Amy Speare, AEF's President. "Youth Mental Health First Aid demystifies and de-stigmatizes youth mental health challenges and will give Arlington a framework with consistent language and a basic understanding of what adolescent mental health looks like."

The Youth Mental Health First Aid program is designed to teach anyone interfacing with youth how to help an adolescent who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenge or who is in crisis. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance abuse, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders.

Sara Burd, Arlington's new Director of Guidance and Social Emotional Learning is excited to bring Youth Mental Health First Aid to Arlington. "Once our adults have a common vision, language and understanding of how to promote the mental health and well-being of our young people, the follow-up work to address locally determined needs at each school will be better informed, more focused and effective." Burd is a certified Youth Mental Health First Aid instructor and implemented the program in the Reading Public Schools.

Just like CPR can be used universally, Youth Mental Health First Aid can be used by anyone in the community who interacts with youth. The program covers early intervention to hand-off to treatment, and will give Arlington's teachers the tools they need to support all students, reduce referrals and keep more students in the classroom.

AEF's support of social and emotional health programs is not new. Over the last 6 years, AEF has seen a dramatic rise in grant requests to support student social and emotional growth and has awarded over \$180,000 in related grants since 2013. In 2016, AEF awarded \$10,000 to help fund the Safe and Supportive Schools self-assessment and the creation of action plans for each school. Previous grants include: AHS Unity and Ottoson Inside OUT public art diversity projects; LGBTQ+ clubs; mindfulness programs; flexible classroom furniture that promotes movement; Innovative Care Coordinator training; and an AHS suicide prevention and awareness program.

About Arlington Education Foundation

For over twenty-five years, AEF has been supporting public education in Arlington and has awarded over \$680,000 to the Arlington Public Schools over the past 5 years. AEF funds system-wide initiatives and creative new projects that enhance public education throughout the district. For more information visit www.aefma.org.