

PRESS RELEASE

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
2901 TROOST AVENUE, KANSAS CITY, MO 64109
816.418.7420 • KCPUBLICSCHOOLS.ORG

New Grant Means Renewed Hope for KCPS Students and Families *\$2.5 million will expand trauma-informed model across schools and the community*

Kansas City, January 16, 2020: Dr. Lateshia Woodley knows that an entire public education system can sometimes hinge on one student and his pencil.

Dr. Woodley is the Executive Director of Student Support Services for Kansas City Public Schools. She shares the story of a young boy who lost his home to arson and was placed in the custody of a relative. That caregiver was then shot to death and the child was moved again. In school one day following these events, he lashed out after another child took his pencil.

In that moment, an educator could have assumed the worst of that child and started a severe discipline process that would only exacerbate this child's trauma. Dr. Woodley doesn't accept that outcome. That's why she celebrated more than anyone when she learned last November that KCPS had successfully earned a \$2.59 million grant through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program.

"When we received this grant, I did a cartwheel and split!" Woodley said.

The VOCA grant is the largest grant KCPS has received under the leadership of Superintendent Mark Bedell. The money will be used to help the district meet its goals under the strategic plan by amplifying and expanding the Trauma-Informed School System Model.

"The VOCA grant is designed to assist us with targeting the needs of students that have been exposed to trauma," Woodley explained. "So, we're able to streamline resources to ensure that they get to the students that are most in need of those services."

The trauma-informed model involves having staff who are trained and equipped to recognize the impact of trauma on students and family members, and then provide the support and resources to address their physical, mental and emotional health and wellness.

Dr. Woodley, her team and KCPS Grant Writer Barbara Wright learned of the VOCA grant in the summer of 2019 and put in extensive work to prepare the district's proposal. Their preparation meant that they were ready to begin to hire new staff and launch districtwide training as soon as the award was announced.

"We're hitting the ground running and are already starting to see the benefits of the grant," Woodley said. "I'm excited about this work. We really are in place to become a model trauma-informed district over the next three to five years based on us being able to implement this practice at the level we are able to with the VOCA grant."

KCPS has already doubled the number of school-based Trauma-Sensitive Clinicians to six thanks to the VOCA grant. These professionals serve as coaches for students, family members, teachers, support staff and school administrators.



The goal is to train every KCPS teacher in a number of trauma-informed interventions that have been proven to be effective. These strategies include conflict resolution, de-escalation and mediation. In addition, staff will be taught how to recognize and treat secondary trauma they experience during their work.

Woodley and her team will also equip students to help themselves deal with the impact of trauma.

“We’re looking to help our students understand their own trauma and begin to unpack coping strategies, as well as conflict resolution skills and how to communicate effectively with adults and their peers,” she said.

The KCPS Mentorship Initiative will benefit from the VOCA grant, as a portion of the money will be used to add a Mentoring Data Analyst and a Mentoring Coordinator.

Mentors are often the first adults connected with a school who learn about cases where students have experienced trauma, according to KCPS Mentoring Services Director Sherenna Clinton. That makes them an important link in the trauma-informed process.

“When things happen to our students, we want to make sure our mentors have the training and resources to respond appropriately,” Ms. Clinton said. “They really are the first point-of-contact in many cases.”

Ultimately, the trauma-informed initiative will take root across the KCPS community. That probably makes Dr. Woodley more animated than anything else when she talks about the VOCA grant.

“We’re looking at a holistic approach, with everyone involved, from the community, to the students, to the staff – everyone being trained in trauma-informed practices,” she said.

Ultimately, the trauma-informed model is about understanding the context of each individual student’s life and the impact that life has on the student’s ability to learn and thrive, Woodley explained.

“Think about a child who doesn’t have a place to lay their head at night, and they are coming into the classroom and we’re expecting to teach them academics. Those pieces play a role in student behavior. Their brains are on this fight or flight mentality,” she said. “In order for you to teach a child, you have to know them.”