

Lakers helping its students, families with Pathways to Potential

Laker Schools understands that in order for students to get the most out of their education, they need to complete an initial crucial step – attend school consistently.

However, for some students, this isn't as easy as it would seem. Various barriers keep them from coming to school, which will impede their ability to be successful now and in the future.

That's why Laker Schools participate in Pathways to Potential, a program provided by the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS). Pathways is an innovative approach to providing human services that targets five outcome areas: attendance, education, health, safety and self-sufficiency. The Pathways to Potential approach relies on three critical elements to help clients reach their greatest potential: The program goes where the client is located; it works one-on-one with families to identify and remove barriers and connect them to a network of services; and it engages community members and school personnel to help families find their road to success.

Pathways to Potential has been at Lakers for two years. Lakers is one of only a handful of schools in the Thumb region to participate.

This year, Allison Ellis is the program's representative. Her title is Success Coach. She visits Laker Secondary Schools on Mondays and Tuesdays and Laker Elementary School on Wednesdays to meet with parents/students/social workers. She also works at Cass City Public Schools.

"We work to help families and individuals get on the path to self-sufficiency," Ellis said. "We help families get connected with various needs, such as medical, employment, food, clothing and housing."

Ellis said if a child isn't getting his/her basic needs met, it can be very difficult for that child to attend school on a regular basis. Pathways to Potential Success Coaches want to ensure students don't miss out on their education.

"We want to remove barriers that keep children from attending school – we want to reduce absenteeism," she said.

Ellis said because Lakers has a free/reduced lunch percentage of more than 55 percent, there is definitely a need here for her services. She noted Laker staff members are very proactive in getting involved with the program and making sure students who need help are getting it. She said they understand students' social needs need to be met as well as academic needs.

"Lakers is getting ahead of the curve – the district sees the big picture," she said.

Parents need to give permission for their child to meet with a Success Coach, unless a social worker or other school employee refers a student to a coach.

Parents can meet with the Success Coach, as well. They can contact Allison Ellis at (989) 225-1972 or ellisa2@michigan.gov to set up an appointment.



Allison Ellis