

FAMS Sixth Grade Families,

Now that the school year is up and running and our sixth graders are settling in, FAMS is excited to share with you details regarding a newly implemented Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum, DBT STEPS-A. Much like standards for Math and Reading, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has also recently implemented state competencies for SEL as a part of their school mental health framework.

Few would argue that adolescents often face numerous social, developmental and academic stressors; life for kids is more complicated than ever. Having positive peer interactions, developing self-confidence, making healthy decisions and controlling impulsive behaviors are among many things that children are working through during their middle school years. FAMS is excited to better equip our students in developing the skills necessary to navigate these challenges independently.

The DBT Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents (DBT STEPS-A) is a curriculum incorporating researched strategies which work towards these goals. It was developed by Dr. James J. Mazza, Dr. Elizabeth T. Dexter-Mazza and colleagues. This material is being taught in many middle and high schools across the country, as well as numerous schools in our area, in order to guide adolescents in effective emotion regulation, decision making, and problem-solving skills.

The DBT STEPS-A curriculum includes lessons designed to fit within a general education curriculum. Our teachers have been trained directly from the authors to instruct this skills training program. The life enhancement strategies that students will be learning include:

- Organization & Time Management Tools
- Core Mindfulness Skills
- Distress Tolerance Skills
- Emotion Regulation Skills
- Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

This unit of lessons is spread over the course of the entire year. Because of the pacing of these lessons, students are allowed the time between each lesson to implement what they have learned through homework, reflection and real life skill application. The skills students learn as a part of each lesson will be applied in other classes at FAMS as teachers from all grade levels will be learning the same strategies in order to implement common language and methods.

Without these skills, students can't access standard academic curricula to their highest ability.

Our ultimate goal is to teach the whole child. Research has shown that students who receive direct SEL instruction develop life skills that benefit them both in school and in their future careers. Students have improved their test scores by 11% and demonstrate increased employability and problem solving skills (Wisconsin DPI). The skills and strategies taught by DBT STEPS-A prepare students to be graduation, college and career ready, and students find this learning valuable and applicable to their lives.

Please reference the Frequently Asked Questions on the back of this letter for additional information.

DBT STEPS-A

FAQ's

How does DBT STEPS-A fit into other FAMS programming?

DBT STEPS-A gives students direct instruction for life enhancing tools. Those tools for emotion regulation, mindfulness, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness allow for students to access strategies that work for them and be able to refocus on curriculum related to the subject at hand. DBT STEPS-A focuses on how students learn as a whole student across the board, while also melding with standards across many courses including for Social Studies, English Language Arts, Health, and others. DBT STEPS-A also integrates with our homeroom programming, PBIS initiatives, and student support services.

Where does DBT STEPS-A fit into my student's day?

DBT STEPS-A is a 30 lesson curriculum taught once a week in Social Studies or at times, Science. Given that two of the three instructors teaching DBT STEPS-A instruct Social Studies and Science, decisions can be made weekly as to where DBT STEPS-A fits into their curricular plan. Students are not covering fewer learning objectives and/or standards in either course as we have made some other changes to accommodate for the instructional time.

The biggest part of how DBT STEPS-A fits into your student's day is that other sixth grade teachers and pupil services staff are learning along with students. This means this critical learning can be transferred, practiced, and supported throughout their whole day.

Was there teacher training involved?

FAMS was fortunate to be included in the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation's offer to provide DBT STEPS-A training and support in our area. Each of our sixth grade Science and Social Studies teachers as well as several pupil services team members participated in a course and training directly from the creators last summer. Each teacher has been actively sharing their learning with other FAMS staff members in order for them to have a shared language and knowledge of strategies to assist them in integrating student learning into their work with students. FAMS will also have continuing guidance and education from the creators of DBT STEPS-A as well as other area schools and professionals implementing the program as questions come up throughout implementation.

How can I support my student in their learning?

After each student lesson, there is often a reflection or short assignment outside of class related to the most recent learning in DBT STEPS-A. Asking your student what they learned about that day and discussing their work would be a great way to reinforce the importance of the skills and strategies included in DBT STEPS-A. Taking this time to reflect helps students understand and apply the skills they learned about in real-life, as well as preparing for their next lesson.

Who do I contact for more information?

Feel free to contact your student's teacher at any time:

- Mrs. Brenda Thayer: thayerb@fortschools.org
- Mrs. Cindy Smith: smithc@fortschools.org
- Mrs. Megan Agnew: agnem@fortschools.org

Additionally, our pupil services team can answer questions related to curriculum and application. Please feel free to contact the main office with any questions and they will be able to direct you to the right person.