



Totino-Grace
High School

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“I was planning to walk into traffic at 3am last night to kill myself, then I thought of you and what you’ve taught me. I knew this feeling was temporary and that you didn’t want me to hurt myself.”

This student was a senior last year and came to me the morning after planning to commit suicide. Her name is Annie and I know her very well. She has been in my office many times (sometimes daily) over the past three years in her struggles with depression and anxiety from a difficult life in the years leading up to (and after) her adoption.

Annie knew me well - we worked on healthy boundaries, communicating needs and wants, balancing work and school, planning for her future and coping through the hardships of her depression, anxiety and relationships. I was in touch with her therapist, parents, school nurse and teachers often. We were a bonded team.

In my school, I serve 260 students. If my ratio was nearly three times that high (Minnesota’s average counselor-to-student ratio is 732:1), Annie would only benefit from occasional crisis support. I would be a trained and overworked adult in the building, not a trusted counselor. She would not have sought me out during one of her many panic attacks, and opted to hide in a bathroom instead. Her parents would not have leaned on me when she left her home, and there would be no direct communication between her therapist to our school to align services.

Annie is one student of many who face complex barriers before entering a classroom. As a result of my school’s investment in licensed counselors, Annie is known, served by a comprehensive counseling program, and chose not to walk into traffic that night. My training reminds me that 50% of my effectiveness as a school counselor comes in building trusting relationships – because of the trust built with Annie and my reasonable caseload, she returned to our school this Fall to address over 900 students and staff to share her story of hope while growing through mental illness. I had the time to coordinate a week of mental health education, including free depression and anxiety screenings.

Legislators, I urge you, for the wellbeing of our Minnesota schools and most importantly the emotional health and stability of our children, please fund the **Support our Students Grant Program** in a continued effort to prioritize children’s health, safety, wellness, education and ensure their full potential as the next generation of leaders.

In compassionate support and advocacy,

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Mr. Morcomb and Annie
Mental Health Week 2018

This story is shared with Annie’s permission.