

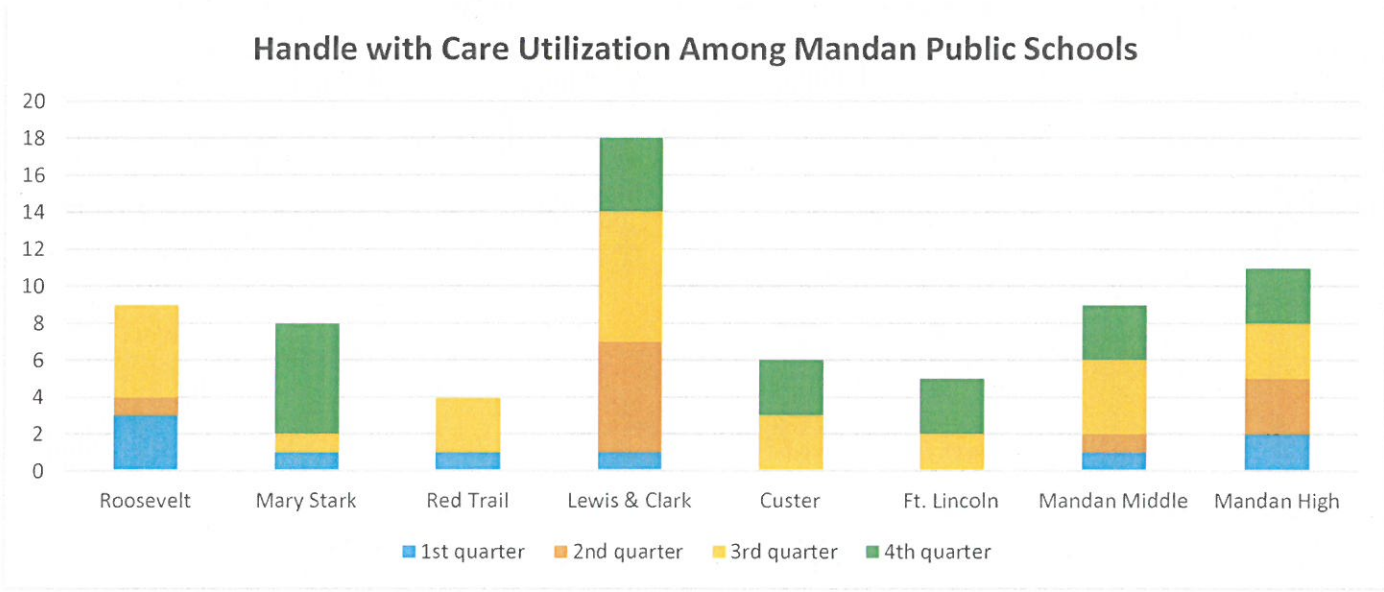


Handle with Care Overview. The Handle with Care (HWC) program is an initiative developed in West Virginia. HWC programs “promote safe and supportive homes, schools and communities that protect children, and help traumatized children heal and thrive.” (West Virginia Center for Children’s Justice) A vital aspect of the HWC program is a strong partnership between schools and police, with additional support and resources provided by social service agencies. The program operates on a simple premise: Many children experience events that could be traumatic or upsetting between the time a school day ends and the next begins. Trauma can affect children’s behavior, mood, and academic performance. (Child Mind Institute) The HWC program is designed so that children involved in or affected by trauma outside of school hours are treated with understanding and compassion by school staff and administration.

An example of a Handle with Care notification goes as follows: If police respond to a domestic violence incident in the evening, and note that there are children present, the responding officer or a designated HWC police staff member will send an email notification to the local school system. That message will be forwarded to the children’s school(s). The message will not contain any details regarding the incident triggering a response – it will simply say, “Handle Susie with care.” This allows school staff to know that Susie may not have slept well, may not have completed assignments, may need a meal, or may demonstrate unusual or inappropriate behaviors. Staff, with this understanding, can respond with compassion and gentle guidance. The HWC program is able to protect and help traumatized children with minimal costs and effort.

Handle with Care in North Dakota. The North Dakota Department of Human Services is responsible for the funding and support of HWC in North Dakota. In May of 2017, Mandan police officers, Mandan Public Schools staff, and selected members of Morton County Social Services participated in a HWC training. Forty-six individuals were trained, with the intent of implementing HWC during the 2017-2018 school year. The program rolled out in August (the beginning of the school year). In September 2017, PCAND program manager Elizabeth Pihlaja attended the national HWC conference in Charleston, WV, so that she could provide informed technical assistance to Mandan and future HWC sites across the state. In January, Sandy Tibke (PCAND Executive Director), Mandan Chief of Police Jason Ziegler, Mandan School Superintendent Mike Bitz, and School Counselor Pam Van Beek presented on the HWC program in Mandan at the North Dakota Association of School Administrators’ (NDASA) Midwinter Conference.

Handle with Care Utilization. The HWC program in Mandan saw an overall positive trend in notifications throughout the 2017-2018 implementation year. While it is possible that the prevalence of incidents requiring a HWC notification have increased, it is most likely that involved personnel in the police force have become more familiar and comfortable with the program, increasing its use in the community. A graph showing the utilization among Mandan Public Schools through the school year can be found below.



As is apparent in the above graph, the HWC program saw a marked increase in notifications during the third quarter. The number of notifications is as follows: **1st quarter** – 9 notifications; **2nd quarter** – 11 notifications; **3rd quarter** – 28 notifications; **4th quarter** – 22 notifications. Both the first and fourth quarters of the year include only two school months (1st quarter – August and September; 4th quarter – April and May). Two elementary schools, Custer Elementary and Ft. Lincoln Elementary, received their first notifications in the third quarter; again, this is possible evidence that as program participants become more familiar with the program and its processes, HWC is becoming more widely utilized in Mandan.

Program participants have had positive reactions to the HWC program. “It helps us understand that we have to find different ways...we’re going to help this kid survive because right now that’s what he needs to do...and then we’ll try to help him thrive,” reported Doreen Oakland, Mandan Middle School counselor. (KX News)

Future Developments. PCAND has received requests for more information about program implementation from five communities: Fargo, Grand Forks, Bismarck, Dickinson, and Jamestown. PCAND staff are working with these school districts to implement the HWC program this school year. Additionally, the West Fargo Public Schools began implementation of the program early in the 2018-2019 school year.

Works Cited

West Virginia Center for Children's Justice. *Handle with Care Overview*. <http://www.handlewithcarewv.org/handle-with-care.php>.

Child Mind Institute. *How Trauma Affects Kids in School*. <https://childmind.org/article/how-trauma-affects-kids-school/>

KX News. *Mandan Police and Mandan Public Schools Partner Up for Handle with Care Program*. <http://www.myndnow.com/news/bismarck-news/mandan-police-and-mandan-public-schools-partner-up-for-handle-with-care-program/952032754>

