



Social workers meet with JPA Therapist: (from left to right) Jenna Silver LCSW, Stephanie Indianer, Brianna Glossett, Jessie Johnson, Michele Lansing LCSW

On Teaching the Whole Child

The non-profit organization Distinctive Schools (**DS**) provides support, supervision, and professional development opportunities for four Chicago International Charter Schools (**CICS**). They are committed to addressing “both academic and social-emotional needs in order to educate the ‘whole child.’” As a result, they are always working to find the best partners in the quest to provide high quality support for their students.

When Mike McCarthy came on board at DS in 2015, he decided to look for providers to help improve the schools’ mental health services. He knew that many of their students needed help in order to address substantive challenges and do well in school. At the time, JPA was already working well with CICS–Bucktown; they suggested he contact JPA to explore ways of expanding their offerings. Our Connect program turned out to be just what he was looking for.

Mike had JPA come and tour the four CICS campuses, where JPA staff saw firsthand the needs and issues facing their students. With four new social workers, he was eager to provide them with experienced supervision and professional development opportunities. He quickly realized that JPA fit the bill. Distinctive Schools signed on with Connect to provide those opportunities, and Mike says they’ve been very happy with the results.

Speaking of their experience with Connect, Mike says Michele Lansing, Connect’s director, provides a “very careful, very supportive, very strong clinical perspective and helps our team think in new ways, look through new lenses, and see kids in new ways. She’s fantastic with the social workers and with me as a consulting ear.”

The schools’ social workers feel the same way. They meet at JPA’s Halsted Street offices once a week and “keep that time sacred,” he says. It’s been a truly “appropriate investment” for them. JPA’s social workers are “really embedded in the schools,” which helps them live up to their goals of reaching the “whole child.” In fact, given JPA’s own emphasis on seeing every child in context, Mike says the two organizations are aligned “incredibly well.” His enthusiasm is evident even over the phone. The partnership between Distinctive Schools and JPA is “everything we could have asked for.” A quick look at the faces of their social workers will tell you he’s right.

For information on how your school can partner with JPA as part of Connect, contact Michele Lansing at mlansing@jpachicago.org.