

Minnesota Principals Academy - Action Learning Project

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Abstract

The unmet mental health needs of youth has been well documented. By conservative estimation, approximately 20% of youth need mental health intervention, with some approximations reaching up to 38% (Paternite, 2005). School based mental health services can provide professional assessment, therapy, and skills training to individual students at school, with the support and involvement of the student's parents. These services help remove barriers for students to access needed services while meeting the child in their natural setting and comfort zone. Ultimately, it can reduce out of school travel time to access needed services while increasing opportunities to coordinate services with the school staff and family.

The goal of this Action Learning Project is to establish and implement a school-based mental health program model that offers services to students in order to reduce barriers to learning while enhancing healthy psychological development.

Vision:

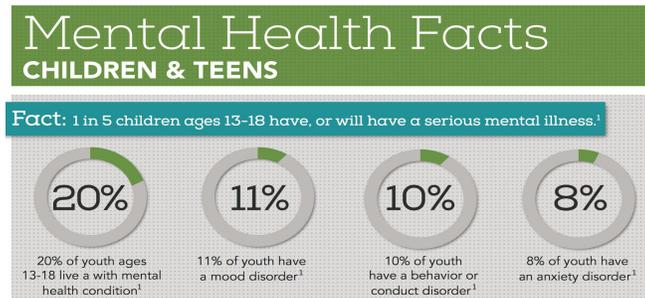
Providing school-based mental health services will improve student's emotional well-being and enhance their ability to access and benefit from instruction.

Background/Context:

The Thief River Falls school district (ISD 564) serves approximately 2,040 students and is located in rural northwestern Minnesota. The school district is comprised of Challenger Elementary School (CES), Franklin Middle School (FMS), Lincoln High School (LHS), and the Northwest Area Learning Center (NWALC). During the 2014-2015 school year, the district partnered with Sanford Health to develop a pilot day treatment program at Franklin Middle School (FMS). The day treatment services were meant to be additional supports for children and families of the Thief River Falls community. Additionally, it was also created to better serve the social-emotional needs of students residing at Pathfinders. Pathfinders is a residential children's treatment center owned and operated by Sanford Health. The long-term goal was to expand behavioral health services in all three schools by strengthening community partnerships. During the 2015-2016 school year, the overall number of students served by Sanford Health was lower than anticipated. This was in part due to the stringent eligibility requirements associated with billing and reimbursement. Ultimately, Sanford Health was not breaking even financially for providing day treatment services in our school facility and their day treatment model was redesigned for the 2016-2017 school year. The question became...through continued partnership, how can we utilize a different model to be more proactive in reaching all students with mental health needs across the district?

Rationale/Why Is It Important?

Mental health has a direct relation to children's learning and development. It interconnects with social-emotional skills, peer and adult relationships, school engagement, certain categorical disabilities, substance abuse, crises prevention, and school safety. The well being of our students directly impacts their ability to be successful in the school environment. Each of these identified areas can have a profound impact to the climate of our buildings and academic outcomes for all students.



Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness

What We Did:

Continued to establish our partnership with Sanford Health with a focus on identifying options to provide school-based mental health services within ISD 564. These services would be provided across district at Challenger Elementary, Franklin Middle, and Lincoln High School. This project included three program components: to further identify community partners, develop a program delivery model, and implement a reimbursable service plan for services.

What We Found Out:

We identified that our program model needs to be clinically designed. Having a licensed clinical mental health provider on-site in our schools will support student access to the mental health identification and treatment process. This mental health provider will be able to conduct psychological evaluations for purposes of diagnosis and treatment. In doing this, reimbursable services may be obtained through insurance billing. Within this program model, the following types of services would be offered to our students: individual therapy, individual and group skills training, and connection to community-based resources. Research into funding options is a continued work in progress. This includes but is not limited to: Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS), School Based Mental Health Grant, etc.

Implications For Practice:

1. Improved student learning and well-being
 - a. Mentally healthy children are more successful in school and life
 - i. Increased student awareness and access to services
 - ii. Increased student achievement
 - iii. Improved student retention
 - b. School staff benefits from teaming with community partners
 - i. Increased awareness of mental health early warning signs and resources