Thoughts on Leadership from Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project Directors

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Jean: Welcome to the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project Director Podcast. Safe Schools/Healthy Students sometimes referred to as SS/HS is a federal grant program funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SS/HS was created in 1999 by the US Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice in response to rising concerns about youth violence, substance use, and school safety. Our guests are all state-level program and project directors, who have supported the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices to promote student mental health and prevent youth violence in three communities across each of their states since 2014. Building on local successes, these individuals are dedicated to expanding this work across their states.

Jean: This podcast series provides listeners with the clearer idea of what it takes to lead programs with many moving parts that work together to promote mental health and safety in schools. My name is Jean Synodinos and I'll be your host. Let's meet our guests. Let's welcome Amanda Pickett. Amanda is with Connecticut's State Education Resource Center, otherwise known as SERC. She oversees the work of Safe Schools/Healthy Students in three districts across the state, helping them build their capacity to provide mental health supports to multi-tiered systems, restorative practices, community collaboration, and classroom management. Amanda, thanks for joining us today.

Amanda: Thanks so much for having me.

Jean: I understand that the three lead education agencies that are implementing Safe Schools/Healthy Students are quite invested in the success of their programs. So, it sounds like you've designed a very well-oiled machine that has empowered your LEAs across the state to implement strategies independently. Would you mind talking about Connecticut's approach, the efficiency of it as well as maybe an example of unanticipated roadblocks that you might have had to overcome?

Amanda: Okay. Here in Connecticut we are very excited about the leadership of our LEAs. We have 163 independent LEAs across the state who all manage what works best for them. We were really intentional with our approach, that we are ensured that the LEAs were empowered to make best fit decisions for how they implemented the core strategies around Safe Schools/Healthy Students in their districts. With that being said, each of the LEAs were part of our state management teams. We met early on in the grant to really outline what were the evidence-based practices that we wanted to look at for implementation.

Amanda: We all agreed that these were evidence-based, the strategies that we could look at, these are approaches that were based in research that could impact the most outcome and change that they wanted to see tied to the core elements of Safe Schools/Healthy

Students, but then we left it up to the LEAs to choose which interventions matched their contextual needs. Each of our districts are unique. New Britain, Middletown, and Bridgeport all have a host of other initiatives and projects that they were working on.

Amanda: So, we wanted to ensure that what they chose matched and aligned with other things that they were participating in. That was really the empowerment piece. We gave them the option of, here's what we think are best practice evidence-based strategies, but now go back to your home base and find what works best for your needs based on data, and looking at how does it align and integrate with other things that you have going on?

Amanda: Also with that is Connecticut as a state-level entity, our state department of [inaudible 00:02:32] invested a lot in multi-tiered system of supports around SRBI for academics as well as behavior. We wanted to make sure that systems were an integral part of how districts approach this work. So looking at what were we using for data, how are we designing leadership teams? How are we encouraging collaboration and coordination? Then, what were those evidence-based strategies going to be that met all of those needs?

Amanda: I think the leadership of the state to ensure that we were using assistance approach in this work was really important. Something that did come up as a roadblock or a hiccup was the data piece. Since there is some state-level data collection that LEAs do participate in, it wasn't capturing the level of data, especially outcome data, that we were looking for the grant. It took us a little bit of time and some work with our evaluation partners to really look at how are we going to collect meaningful data to ensure outcomes for students?

Jean: Amanda, this really proves to me that you've implemented Safe Schools/Healthy Students throughout the state in a way that it was actually attended. The model, the framework does not try and make every school district do the same darned thing. One size does not fit all, and you used the word empowering to describe this. So, thanks for touching on that. You also mentioned leadership teams. Would you mind telling us what those teams look like?

Amanda: Yes, and thank you for that kudos. It was a lot of hard work, and it took honestly bringing folks to the table. That links directly with the leadership team piece. Oftentimes, when we start this work districts already have teams. They have zillions of teams who are meeting for zillions of reasons. So, what we tried hard to do was let's take an inventory of the teams that exist, and then how can we best meet the needs of the grant and align with a team that maybe already exists, but expand membership? It was really important for us to have true representation beyond just our typical school players.

Amanda: We needed buy-in from all the way up to the superintendent and school leaders. We needed teacher representation, general ed and special ed. We needed all of our support staff to be represented. We needed families at the table. We needed student voice to be part of our decision making, and also community collaboration. This took some time. At the state level, it really was about our internal leadership team valuing getting feedback from others, and then I want to give a lot of kudos to the LEAs, who I think

implemented an even more in-depth leadership teams at their community meetings where they brought together the stakeholders that impacted their community the most.

Jean: You've got leadership at the local level. You've got leadership at the state level. I'm curious to know, how are successes identified and acknowledged at both levels?

Amanda: This has been, really, the charge of our no-cost extension work. We were so heavy and deep in the work the first five years of the grant that we didn't do a great job of highlighting all of that success at the state level. For the state level, our no-cost extension year we spent all of our activity time really highlighting the successes of the three LEAs.

Amanda: We did that through in a couple ways. We, A, did a online website where we shared resources, best practice, how do they do it, really the down and dirty of it. How much did it cost? How much people time? What did it look like? We also did a large statewide conference for over 300 people where we had a keynote address behavior and mental health concerns at the global level, and then the breakout sessions were really targeted around what did this look like in our LEAs and across the state?

Amanda: Then we were also providing targeted TA to schools who weren't our three LEAs, but using the lessons learned from them to guide that more tailored support to those districts who weren't part of our overall five-year grant. I will say that our three LEAs, I think, did a much better job of highlighting their successes as the grant was going on. Each of those LEAs worked hard at aligning and integrating their Safe Schools/Healthy Students work with their overall framework of their districts. So, really look at how do we sustain this work beyond the five years to ensure that it's aligned with the district vision, and mission, and their work plans?

Amanda: They've also deeply rooted in their website and Facebook in ensuring that communities at large know what they're doing. I'm going to highlight New Britain here for one of our LEAs. Their website and their Facebook page has all their activities that they're doing around Safe Schools/Healthy Students, but they've done such a great job that it's not just coined as Safe Schools/Healthy Students in New Britain. It's really their work, and what they do, and it's deeply rooted in their mission, vision, and their district activities.

Jean: Thank you for that incredibly comprehensive look at how successes are acknowledged, and how the LEAs themselves are ensuring that their wider communities also know about this work. Amanda, I can't thank you enough for spending a few minutes of your time to talk with us today. I really appreciate it.

Amanda: Thank you so much.

Jean: Our next guest is Shawn Cannarile from the Michigan State Schools Healthy Students Initiative. Thanks for joining us for this podcast Shawn.

Shawn: Thank you so much for having me. I'm honored to be here.

Jean: One of the hallmarks of Michigan's Initiative is your integration of many grants and programs that focus on child wellbeing. You created a partnership to serve as an umbrella for this work. And I understand that this partnership has really been central to sustaining and expanding the work across the state.

Jean: I'm wondering if you could talk about how forming this partnership, how you got people to the table, what challenges you might have faced, maybe talk about how this coalition has worked to solve problems collectively?

Shawn: Absolutely and we are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be awarded the Safe School's Healthy Students Grant because it allowed us to do exactly that. What started out as a grant requirement to form a state management team, as we continued our work and additionally got the Project Aware Grant and the School Climate and Transformation Grant. Recognizing that we did not want to duplicate our efforts and/or waste time of our partners and multiple meetings on multiple teams, we brought our coordinators together, of these grants, the grant leads, and then embraced our stakeholders that we were already partnering with and brought together a core team across agencies and asked if they would be willing to also be inclusive of these other grants and we formed a joint state management team.

Shawn: Through that as we continued to progress and decided based on our grant requirements, based on our federal requirements also, we also decided that we wanted this to be more than just a ... I think, as you know, The Safe School's Healthy Students Grant, there are elements that we were required to provide outcomes on. We wanted to do more than just be an element based initiative. We wanted to be able to sustain these efforts over time and start to bridge our agency systems together to create the best outcomes for children and families. So that's what we did. We started really working towards what are the systems that each of our agencies work and use and how can we bring those systems together?

Shawn: Over time we morphed into what is now called the Michigan Health and Education Partnership. That was very intentional and came with a lot of guidance from our core team and then also our external stake holders. Our core team was represented by cross agency partnerships and then also within our own state department cross office partnerships.

Shawn: You mentioned earlier Jean, Whole Child. And typically, historically we understand probably across states that discussing Whole Child and the work that we do around academic outcomes, it's not always linked and we can work in silos. It was very important to us to look at our own house as well as reaching out to external partners to understand what we needed to do at the Michigan Department of Education to better link our work and then through that we could better connect our services through other agencies, such as Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Parent Action for Healthy Kids and also at the local level.

Shawn: The Michigan Health and Education Partnership is a stakeholder of state representation but also it represents our LEA's. Across Safe School's Healthy Students. Across Our

Project Aware. Across School Climate Transformation. We're able to reach across the state in that way at the local level, at the I-S-D level and at the state level.

Jean: Shawn That's phenomenal. That's a heck of a mountain you've climbed. Now I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the leadership of this partnership that Michigan Health and Education Partnership? Who's at the helm? What kind of leadership model do you use? Is it a shared leadership model? How do you guys collectively decided what to focus on when grants frequently have similar goals but not always the same ways to measure success.

Shawn: Absolutely and that's a really good question and I want to be very transparent because it has not been easy. We've come across many challenges, many hurdles. Because the Safe School's Healthy Students Grant, it's a monumental grant. It's requesting us addressing many things across all the elements that we understand around culture and climate, mental and behavioral health, early childhood, family engagement. There's just so much that we're trying to tackle at once. It really became how do we do this in a meaningful way?

Shawn: We know we have this large logic model that we were addressing within just the one grant. But how do we tackle all of these things in a meaningful way and still produce outcomes that's beneficial to each of our agency partners and our, actually our individualized work. The leadership became the coordinators of each of the grants, are the leads. Then what we did over the course of becoming the Michigan Health and Education Partnership is really lead a monthly core team that met, like I mentioned, every month. Then we had quarterly meetings where we brought all of our stakeholders together and that really focused on highlighting the grant initiatives specifically but then going into the deeper dive, what systemically can we do through this partnership to showcase what's working?

Shawn: Then once we understand what's working, how can we take those pieces back to our own agencies and back to our own individual work and really start to embed it in a meaningful way? I guess the best thing I could say for where we're at this point is, there's this continuum that we are recognizing that's really important to understand and that not every agency or every individual's work is going to be ... It's not going to be recognized in the exact same way at every meeting and at every initiative, however this synergy around understanding what our systems are and how they integrate was more valuable than we even imagined because we are facing a very difficult time through each of our agencies, the larger ones being DHHS and MTE, of complete reorganization from the leadership on down. You know as you travel through these leadership changes your whole infrastructure can be affected.

Shawn: To be honest we are now down from four coordinators to one which is myself and we are going through reorganization. However, the benefit of that is that now, moving into sustainability and the end of the Safe Schools Healthy Students Grant, we are looking at changing to co coordination across agency. Meaning instead of having all of the leadership come from one agency we are looking at having a shared co-chair, co coordination that could be sustained across agencies without the funding of a grant. I'm

very excited about this because we weren't sure if we were gonna be able to live on without the funding.

Shawn: This means that without a funded position such as myself or any of the other coordinators, Michigan Health and Education Partnership has the potential to live on and to continue to share the lessons learned and the progress that we're having that's been embedded from the Safe Schools Healthy Students Grant and Project Aware and the School Climate Transformation Grant. That has the potential to last on beyond the grants. That is what we're looking forward to.

Jean: Shawn thank you so much for that extraordinary comprehensive answer and for the incredible leadership that you and other agency leads and grant leads and partners and stakeholders are clearly demonstrating for the sake of Michigan's children and families and schools. Thanks so much for joining us today Shawn.

Shawn: Thank you I'm honored to be here again and I appreciate the opportunity share some of the work that we've been doing and that we hope to continue over time. Thanks so much Jean.

Jean: I'd like to give a warm welcome to Beth Herman of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Beth has served as the state's safe schools, healthy students project coordinator, and she supports the work of lead education agencies in the diverse and underserved communities of Beloit, Racine and Menomonie. Hi Beth.

Beth: Hi, Jean.

Jean: Wisconsin's safe schools healthy students initiative has seen some really impressive outcomes at the local level. We've seen significant decreases in the number of students who have experienced bullying or report involvement in physical fights and you've seen less alcohol consumption among high school students and in just one year your state trained 2,000 people to support the social, emotional and behavioral health of students, and these are real measures of success. So I'm wondering how do you measure your own success as a state project director? What have been your own metrics, so to speak, over the past four years?

Beth: I always find that question interesting because I am a bit of a data geek myself, but my metrics are a little bit less numbers. So for example, as most people probably know Wisconsin is a local controlled state and probably the most far definition of what that means. I learned pretty early on that each of these communities that I was working with had a pretty good handle on what they needed and my job was to support when necessary and get out of the way when necessary. I think that the number that you see, those outcomes that you see really have so much to do with the fact that the local district determined what they were going to focus on and the best ways to reach those numbers. So the tail is partially in those numbers, but it's also in the fact that we're seeing Beloit and Menomonie each did different things in order to reach those numbers and they chose interventions that would work for them.

Jean: How did the state play a role in helping each of those local communities choose the evidence based programs or services that we're going to be right for them?

Beth: So at the state level here, our department is, at least our team anyway, isn't really involved in monitoring. We're involved in providing technical assistance and trainings, and so what we would do with each of those communities is provide options. Menomonie, for example, found much of their own on their own simply because they were looking for interventions and programs that would be culturally relevant for them. At the state level, what that does then is it's almost a reverse piece for us. We take what Menomonie learned or what Menomonie found and then we can share that with other like-minded communities. So, we provided some training in some cases because we're talking about a lot of different interventions. We're talking about AOD interventions and social emotional learning and family engagement, all those different five areas.

Beth: We provided support through resources and training for screening for young children and for the pyramid model for social emotional learning in young children. We would make connections for these different communities to other communities that have been doing the work and found some success. It's not a metric so much as it is a visual for myself, but I see myself working at the state level as like the hub of a wheel. I gather the spokes or the information coming from the different local communities and going back out to those local communities and kind of making sure that the districts that we were working with in this project had connections, had support that they needed to do some of that work. Some of the districts required a little bit or asked for a little bit more assistance in identifying resources and others were able to locate some on their own.

Jean: Beth, I really love that image of seeing yourself as the hub of that wheel with spokes coming in and out so that this, the work in Wisconsin between local lead education agencies, communities and school districts, and the state is really two way. It's not just the state pushing information out, but you're also taking in a lot of information from every one of those local communities so you can be supplying or finding the best possible technical assistance that you can.

Beth: Absolutely.

Jean: So looking down the road, I know that your office is helping to expand school based mental health to schools across the state. Now, how do you take those local successes and translate them to state level policy makers and legislators? How do you tell that story to impact policy and systems?

Beth: So I think it actually starts by making multiple stories one story. So by that I mean is as you may be aware that we also receive funding through Climate Transformation and the AWARE project and so with the safe schools, healthy students, we have three local labs if you will, in our communities. If we also pull in all the work that we're doing at AWARE, we now have six and if we also pull in all the work that we're doing at Climate Transformation, we have even more and these are all local lab communities that has been doing work in mental health, and I'd say that broadly because it can be AODA issues. It can be social emotional learning, it can be trauma informed care. I mean

there's all these different things that fall under the umbrella of school mental health, and by creating a big group of local labs, we have more to take to the community.

Beth: For us I think where it really started was taking it internally in our agency. So for example, as these things started to show promise and started to show the outcomes that you mentioned at the beginning, these were things that our team and then our supervisors and then our division managers worked all the way up to getting that information to the state superintendent and through getting the support of the state superintendent, we were also able then to increase communication sorts of pieces. So for example, doing videos of good practice in mental health and social emotional learning, really well done, beautiful videos from our education team here who then we can put those online and share those. Taking the information to legislators, getting different advocacy groups who wanted to support this work to work with us.

Beth: So as state employees we can't advocate and we can't lobby. So we needed to get the information about the needs that we had in the state and the successes that different communities had had to different stakeholders that could support us in that work. It's really hard at this point to pin down exactly what happened. I would say one of the things that had a huge impact was, again, the Gannett news series that started to take a look at a student mental health and the really, really challenging things that schools and communities we're dealing with and multiple suicides and just all sorts of emotion and data both together around that and the newspaper series did some town hall meetings and that really started to generate, not just coming from us but coming from grassroots, from families, from schools, educators, administrators about we need more supports for this.

Beth: We utilized that as it was happening to sort of say, "We agree and here's some resources, here's some things that we know people are doing." So with the help of all of those different little things that fell into place and a superintendent, state superintendent that really supported the work, we were able to receive funding because it was requested through our state biennial budget, the last budget go around to support mental health in schools, and we received money for training. We received the money to support increased social work time and buildings and then we also received money for a competitive grant process. We received from the state, 3.25 million to provide to local school districts through a competitive grant process. We received applications requesting well over eight million.

Beth: So that is a data point, that is a communication point that we're now using to go back out and say, "The needs are greater than we've allocated funding for and are now requesting more funds for the next biennium budget." So there have been a number of different ways. If I just sum it up, it's utilizing stakeholders, it's taking successes and making sure that people internally in our department know and those stakeholders know. It's utilizing the momentum that's being produced by families and communities across the state because of the challenges, and then it's just being ready with support and resources so that when schools in districts and those stakeholders start to push things forward that you're ready to roll. With those three grant projects that we had and the number of different local labs that we had, we were ready to take on that challenge.

Jean:	Beth, congratulations. Not just on the successes you've seen on the ground with safe schools, healthy students initiatives but on creating that momentum, building on that momentum, having the resources ready and in place, and of course on getting the start of a substantive commitment from the state to make sure that these needed services are available to students across Wisconsin. I can't thank you enough for your time today. Really appreciate your leadership with this grant. Thank you so much, Beth.
Beth:	You're welcome.
Jean:	Our next guests are the co-leads for the Ohio's Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative.
Jean:	James Trevino is with the Office of Prevention and Wellness in the States Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and he's joined by Jill Jackson from Ohio's Department of Education Office for Innovation and Improvement.
Jean:	Hello, Jill and James, and thanks to both of you for giving us a few minutes of your time.
James:	Hello, Jean. How are you?
Jill:	Hi, Jean. Thanks for having us.
Jean:	Oh, it's a pleasure, so let's dive right in. The Ohio's Safe Schools/Healthy Students project has done some really great work with collective impact. How did you establish consensus for this approach, and can you talk about your common agenda for the coming year?
James:	With this grant, Jean, we began with the end in mind. We understood from the beginning that once the funding ended that what we were going to put in place would be somewhat maintained and, through our efforts, it has. So I will let Jill talk a little bit about the collective impact area.
Jill:	Jean, with our three grantees, of course, as required through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant, each of the communities had to have Community Management Teams. Working with the Community Management Team we then facilitated the collective impact process. Having them about year three into the grant, at that point having had some wind, start to talk about what they thought was going to work and what they needed to maintain.
Jill:	Working with the end in mind for us meant two things. One, that there was ownership of the work locally and it was no longer, not just SAMHSA's work, or not Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services work or ODEs work, but it was that local county's work. They utilize the collective impact process to determine the common agenda for their localized work, and, as a result, we can very proudly say all three of the community management teams have determined themselves to continue to work to meet the needs of their community, further the activities that were successful and have identified a local agency that will be that backbone of support so that their common agenda can be met.

James: And with that, Jean, I would like to add that they've also identified funding sources that were able to continue funding for prevention specialists, therapists in the schools. Therefore, this will be maintained in the schools. New positions have been developed and will be stable within those community schools.

Jean: Jill and James, this is some extraordinary success at the local level. It sounds like every one of these districts has really claimed ownership of the work. They have committed to what works. They have found funding for what works to sustain it, and it's there now in the fabric of each of those communities.

Jean: Do you think it's possible that you can apply this same process, using collective impact, at other school districts in the state to get similar results?

Jill: I would say school districts and communities. The Community Management Teams were essential. They were the nexus to the success to Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant. It was the opportunity to bridge any barriers that had previously existed with school districts and community agencies to meet the needs of their students and families. This was not a state-driven approach, it was really a local community-driven approach and we took a different position to state agencies to ensure that they were supported as much as they needed so that when we got to year three and year four of the grant, they had that sense of ownership and then it makes sense as next steps for us to then apply the collective impact process.

James: And to piggy-back off of what Jill said, even though had three communities on the same grant, their location determined three different types of work that was being done. They all came out with different needs, different ways of doing things. We focused on working from the bottom up and we also took a systems approach. We helped bridge that gap of what their needs were to help them understand that the services were there, it's just trying to work together so they're not fighting for the same about of dollars, that if someone's already doing something else, another agency, that they can benefit from, etc. And like Jill said earlier that's where the Community Management Teams were valuable.

Jean: I understand that you recently had a tremendous statewide conference, right? What was the catalyst for pulling everyone together for this meeting, and would you mind sharing some of the highlights?

Jill: We actually held a one-day event the fourth year of the grant funding, and held a one-day summit. In which it was really a focus on the grant communities because at that point they had completed all four years of the grant work and they really just focused on what they did as grant communities and shared that statewide. We followed that up year five with a two-day conference in which we then, not only reflected on the work of the grant community at this point pretty much, but we were also required to have a state management team. Those partners were hugely valuable in one, building systems and partnerships, as James just described, as well as helping our community management teams and our grantees address their local needs. We knew that other school districts and other community agencies needed those same types of supports, information, and resources.

Jill: So our year five conference, the Safe and Healthy Schools Conference, was a two-day conference because it went beyond the grantees. It was reflective of our whole state management team. We had over 300 people attend the conference, so there was a lot of interest and evaluations proved that folks that attended benefited from learning from, not only our grantees, but our state management team members.

James: What I found most exciting, or what the participants found most exciting was: these were processes that they have not done yet, or if they had done they were able to come to these sessions, especially with our grantees, and understand what work, what didn't, and we were able to connect them with a lot of state leaders, state agency leaders and to them, for locals, that's a really big benefit. To have a better understanding of what funding is available and how other agencies work. It was just very successful. We got great feedback. I think we had a 96% approval rate and everyone left very educated and just really happy that they were able to attend.

Jill: One more thing, Jean. One of the models in Ohio that our state agencies' leadership requires of us, is not so much for us to always be presenting as talking heads and policy and regulatory folks, but to have examples of our work communicated from peer to peer learning at conferences. So not only did we have every Health and Human Service agency from Department of Youth Services, Job and Family Services, Department of Health, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Education, and the like, but we also had casual linguistic competency folks there as well as those local representatives in each of those areas, and really communicated to the audience that if you're working to build these systems then this is an example of the type of partners that you also need to have and/or be working with to meet those behavioral health and mental health needs of your students and families in your local community.

Jean: Jill and James, you are co-leads on this grant, and would you mind taking about how to collaborate together?

James: (laughs)

Jill: Okay, break! Time-out!

James: We can't talk about it.

Jill: I'm sorry, we can't.

James: Jill has the left brain, I have the right brain.

Jill: Literally.

James: And we literally-

Jill: Literally. We are combine-ly a great team. James and I have polar opposite but very compatible strength areas. James is very good in the fiduciary and-

James: Budget.

Jill: Yes, and I am a program person all day long. I knew when to step back and I knew when to let him lead. And he knew when to step back and let me lead. We just had a natural-

James: Flow.

Jill: Yeah, flow.

James: We're known as "Jimill".

Jill: We flow so much they even gave us a name-

James: Jimill. On conference calls. "Jimill is here!"

Jill: Yeah.

James: Like that.

Jean: You both have a lot to be proud of. You've had a lot of fun doing this, that's pretty evident, and I just want to thank you so much for taking a few minutes out of your day to share your thoughts with us. Thanks so much!

James: Thank you. This work will also be on our Department of Mental Health and Addictions website, and you can find that at MHA.ohio.gov. When you get to the home page, under the search area type in 'safe' and then hit 'go' and that will take you directly to the Safe Schools/Healthy Students work that we have done over the past five years.

Jill: Jean, thank you so very much. It was important for James and I to leave this legacy in Ohio of work based on the opportunity given to us by SAMHSA. We didn't take it lightly. To ensure we created safe and supportive learning environments in Ohio schools with access to behavioral health and mental health services for all.

Jean: Pat Sanborn is the project director for the Nevada Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative. While Pat is based in the state's capital of Carson City, the grant supports programs in Washoe, Lyon, and Nye Counties. Prior to overseeing the Nevada initiative, Pat was a local Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project Director at the Willits Unified School District in Willits, California.

Jean: Thank you for joining us on the podcast today, Pat.

Pat: Oh, well thank you for having me. I'm very happy to be here.

Jean: Pat, you've seen the Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative evolve over time from a grant that was originally delivered directly to school districts, like Willits, to a state-based model. Having served as a project director at both the local and the state level, I

wonder if you could share your thoughts on the similarities and the differences of leading this kind of project at both the state and local levels.

Pat: Sure, I'd be happy to. The first similarity that I would say is that at the Willits School District level, even though it was granted to a specific district, Willits, it was also composed of a consortium of three districts, very similar to the way the state grant is structured. Two of them were rural communities, and the third was a frontier district, which had about a 75%, 75 to 80% population of Native Americans. So, there are cultural differences as well. And I have the same thing at the state level. There is districts that have more Native American composition in their student population than the other two, and they are also three communities within the state of Nevada that are striving for the same outcomes.

Pat: Another similarity would be that we each had a partnership group to manage and to guide the outcomes at the district level in Willits. We had a community management team, and we had partners that were composed from leaders of a school district, of a juvenile justice, of law enforcement, mental health. So, those leaders were all at the table at both the district level and at the state level, more or less.

Jean: Pat, those are some really interesting similarities between state and local work. What about those differences, though?

Pat: Yeah, they were quite a few differences, and it took me a while to kind of figure those out, but the first thing I noticed is that at the state level, it's much more complicated and time-consuming to navigate the system. I had much closer connection with the state leaders at the community level in Willits, but it was more difficult to get those higher level people into our state management team.

Pat: In Nevada, the difference is that the grant funding goes to community-based coalitions, and so because Nevada is such a rural state, there are community-focused coalition all over the state that are brought together with a state coalition team. So, we have executive directors of these different coalitions.

Jean: Pat, one of the things that's really central to the success of any Safe Schools initiative, either at the local level or the state level, is that ability to look at data, to assess it, to use data to help you drive decisions, see what's working, make mid-course corrections as needed. I'm wondering, at the local level in Willits, how you collected your data, looked at your data, and how that might be different in Nevada, especially, which is a Safe School state, where the school district isn't funded. The LEA isn't funded. But community organizations are funded.

Pat: Yes. That's a pretty big difference. In California, we were able to use California Healthy Kids survey, and it happened in every school district, within the grant, and it happened annually. We had really great data across all the years. We were able to make comparisons within each school district, because within the consortium, they all used the same student information system, and so we were able to input data as well as collect it out of there. And then through our evaluator, we were able to have quarterly

PowerPoint presentations about what we're seeing in the data, and what direction we might need to go in the coming months. So, that was really joyful to be part of, to be able to see that change as it was happening.

Pat: Whereas at the state level, here in Nevada, we collect data every other year through the Youth Risk Behavior survey. Because all of the districts are wide and spread apart, and teachers are ... there's short-staffing in teachers. It's very difficult to get every student in grades five, seven, nine, and 11 to collect that annual data. So, that was a bit of a barrier.

Pat: But we are building our systems here within the State Department of Education to include more data collection through the student information system that the state uses. So, soon, we're really looking forward to it, we'll have different tabs on the data collection system called Infinite Campus, that we'll be able to collect data and use it on a regular basis, more like we were in the local level.

Jean: Just one more question for you today, Pat. In your work, how have you brought Nevada state agencies together in what we've heard called The Collaboratory? We love this word so much. Could you talk about that for a minute?

Pat: Yeah, I'd love to. You know, it just came as ... I was reading through a journal, and I'm sorry, I don't remember the name of the journal. But I saw the word and I thought, That is such a great word. I really love the concept of blending collaboration with laboratory. We're talking about science-based and evidence-based decision-making, and we're collaborating at the table when we all come together.

Pat: It's grown to be much more of a place, a physical space, where connection and collaboration on different projects, different thoughts, centered around bringing out the best from all of our partners, because we all want to produce the best possible result. And so, we talk through some of these things, with intentionality and recognition that we all have different perspectives.

Pat: The laboratory piece has a deeper meaning, in that not only is it a place where we discuss evidence, practices, and social relationships, but it also follows the concept of a science lab, where it's okay to make mistakes, because that is where you learn. So, that freedom allows people to express themselves and to come up with ideas that may or may not work, but with an intention of working and with an intention of success, we can all be successful.

Pat: I think that kind of covers most of it, but it's a much deeper level. You become part of it as opposed to participating in it.

Jean: Pat, that was a great explanation for The Collaboratory. Thank you so much for clarifying that beautiful word. And thank you so much for participating in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students podcast today. We really appreciated your time, and all the years you've spent making lives for children and youth and families better in California, and now Nevada.

Pat: Oh, thank you for having me. This has been a joy. Thanks, Jean.

Jean: Thanks, Pat. We're honored to welcome Mary Steady as our next guest on the Safe Schools Healthy Students Project Director podcast. And for years, Mary led New Hampshire's Initiative as its greatest champion. So, welcome Mary.

Mary: Thank you. I'm very happy to be here with you.

Jean: Mary, let's jump right in with a two part question. First, how important do you think it is for an effective leader to also be an effective communicator? And did the New Hampshire Initiative typically communicate to different groups of people, different audiences, from students to parents to teachers and all the way up to state agencies and policymakers?

Mary: So, the first part of your question is, it's extremely important for effective communication. I think that was probably one of the highlights of our project, and that the reason we were able to move it from a grant to a project to actually systems change in New Hampshire. We were able to rally support from teachers, parents, policymakers, around that.

Jean: So, diving a little bit deeper, how did you typically communicate with different audiences?

Mary: The first thing that we did is we made ourself visible, whether that was in person with people, online, print, audio. We weren't sure exactly our message in the very beginning. We knew that we wanted to make sure that there was a comprehensive school mental health approach in schools, how that was actually going to come to fruition wasn't clear at first. But, as we continued to listen to people, and listen to our various constituents it helped us guide our project because we were able to take whatever practices they felt were necessary, and make policy changes. So, one of the things that we ended up doing was taking this complex model and making our message very simple and clear.

Jean: So, I just want to acknowledge that you mentioned the importance of listening to your audiences and your stakeholders. That's something that a born communicator inherently knows to do. Understanding that communication isn't a one-way street, it's really a two-way street. So, I would describe you, and everybody who worked on the Initiative, as born communicators. But for those who feel that communication isn't necessarily easy to do, do you have any recommendations?

Mary: Be a risk taker. Communication, I don't think is necessarily easy for me. I can be shy by nature at times, but really listening to people, watching them with your eyes, also watching their body language so when they could relate to something you're making a mental note that, that was a message that rang true with them also. And then, being able to take that message, understanding how your project relates to that, and then feeding that back in a way that they would understand.

Mary: It's very important to have your authentic voice because when you go to deliver the systems change within your stay. You have to make sure that you're following up with what you delivered and if it's somebody else's message and you're unclear of their message, then the promises won't come to fruition and you won't be able to live up to that. So, making sure that you're authentic, that ... so you're using your voice, that your message is simple, that you're listening not only with your ears but your eyes to body language and you're asking a lot of questions. This will allow [inaudible 00:03:52] to have this really deep connection with people and help you avoid misunderstandings.

Jean: Again, I wanna acknowledge the listening part especially because when we think about communication and we don't always think about listening, listening allows us to really collect sort of, added anecdotal data in a way about our audiences, their need, their wishes and how they ... and what the message is gonna be. So, I wanna thank you Mary for joining us today as a guest on the Safe Schools Healthy Students Project Director podcast. Your leadership has been absolutely invaluable for the state of New Hampshire. Thank you so much for joining us.

Mary: Thank you and I was delighted to be here.

Jean: Anne Katona Lynn has overseen the Pennsylvania Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative since 2014, supporting mental health and youth violence prevention in the Penn Crest, Lehigh, and Northeastern school districts. It's so great to talk with you Anne. Thanks for joining us.

Anne: Thanks for having me. Great to be here.

Jean: So as you know Safe Schools, Healthy Students is essentially a school based initiative that provides programs and services to youth where they learn. As a state project director, however, you're not necessarily on the ground at these schools to see how the work is being implemented. So would you mind sharing some thoughts with us about how you keep those lines of communication going with local staff to provide the support they need to help them overcome roadblocks, to identify success stories and more?

Anne: Well, I think actually the way our role was set up was that we were connected to the state and my co-director and I both divided up the ... I was at two of the sites, and she was at one of the sites, so we were actually able to be on site locally maybe a little bit more than some other state directors had been able to do, just based on their role? So we really did provide a lot of training and technical assistance to the local sites. And that was a key piece. And I think the other piece is having regular communication with them. We have weekly phone calls with our local program managers every Thursday morning, and then once a month, we had our SAMSA partners join the call.

Anne: So I think that was a big piece, as well as having our local program managers and other key people coming to the state leadership and management teams and presenting different successes, being on some work groups at the state level, so one example, we had a cross systems training work group at the state level and all three of the local program managers were participating on that group.

Anne: So we've created some communities of practice I would say to help ensure that the local sites are really connecting with the state leads and just state partners in general so that it's not just different layers making decisions or developing plans. So I think those were huge pieces, as well as my co-director and I, Deanna, we both would attend a lot of the local meetings. So we were able to really be on the ground, which was kind of a nice thing.

Jean: It is a nice thing. And I'd love to ask you a little bit more about the communities of practice. What areas of practice are you establishing or have you established those communities in and how did you choose those?

Anne: The way the communities of practice, really they're in the process of developing and expanding, but they've been based on topics of interest. And one thing that at the state level, at the local level, all of us agreed that trauma was a huge need and a topic that crossed all layers of our support and just from down to the kids, all the way up to the staff, through systems, all of those pieces. So we really prioritized trauma, and so we started a trauma community of practice. And again as I said, those are state level people, they're local people, there are people from just private organizations that aren't necessarily state government.

Anne: But for the most part they are state government and so we're all working around developing kind of a common vision and mission and purpose for our groups so that we know what it is that we're going to be doing. Some of the other groups that have now sense developed, we have an evaluation community of practice. So evaluators from all the different state grants, state and local grants, are all coming together to work on what are the things that we can all do that are common for all of us, how can we share information, how can we share resources and not remain in our silos?

Anne: We've identified different key topics. Some additional ones, peer supports. Certified peer supports are coming for specifically for families, as well as for youth. They're a variety of, I know of different ideas that are coming out. It's based on a need, you know? Somebody identifies, hey, let's develop a community of practice for this, so it's exciting, I'm very excited for that work.

Jean: And I just want to acknowledge that I really appreciate that you described this as a response to need and that the needs been expressed. You guys have really figured out how you want to collaboratively fill that need. So I'm wondering Anne, when you think back over the years that you've spent with Safe Schools, Healthy Students, whether it's at the local level, or the state level, what might be one or two of the most rewarding outcomes that you saw in this work?

Anne: I think one of the keys for me is being able to connect the dots with so many things that are happening, and just really having the permission to break down the silos. I think we almost created them unintentionally, and now just having the permission to say, well, let's figure out how to work together. And just having that commitment, and then obviously the funds to support it, but really just having the leadership commitment to break down the silos and to change how we do business. I think that was a huge piece

for me, because I've been able to see how that same concept can be carried out in anything.

Anne: We have a local coalition around suicide that that same concept of let's connect the dots and let's not just stay in our silo, saying, oh, well this is a human service role, this is a drug and alcohol role, how can we figure it out to do that? So that for me is the connect the dots. By co-director calls me Spider-woman because I like to create webs, so me that was very rewarding and I love that work and I love just the public health model.

Anne: I think the other piece is really being able to make a change in schools that is really completely systematic and that it is a public health model, that it's all three tiers of support and doing it in a way that we really had to engage the local people and make sure that they had buy in and they really owned it, and so the fact that they didn't really like data in the beginning but then as we went on, they really appreciated data and then they got to a point we're like, "Well, we're not collecting enough data."

Anne: So it was nice to see the evolution of data collection and analysis and to see that with educators and them not be freaked out by data. Again, they initially were, but we held their hand and made sure that they had all the tools that they needed and tried to create success as much as possible. So for me that was extremely powerful as well.

Jean: Anne, that's a beautiful way of describing it, connecting the dots, de-siloing so that you can connect those dots, and then creating this powerful systems change that's not going to go anywhere, it's really now the way business is done in Pennsylvania. So I just want to take a moment to thank you so much for sharing that insight for our Safe Schools, Healthy Students Project Director podcast. Thank you Anne.

Anne: Thank you very much.