Improving Access

to Mental Health Services

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| After identifying gaps in mental health services within our middle schools, we launched the Healthy Minds program—providing training for teachers and staff and a curriculum to foster mental health for students. Positive results were evident after just one year, and more students are getting the support they need. |
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| THROUGH THE HEALTHY MINDS PROGRAM, WE CAN BETTER MEET STUDENTS’ MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS |

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 challenge

Tommy was a successful, well-liked student all through elementary school, but in middle school that all changed. He began acting out and even skipping classes. His teachers grew concerned as his grades dropped, and his classmates steered clear of his bullying behavior. Tommy is not unique in this regard.

In the Anytown District Schools, it is estimated that 1 in 5 students will experience a mental health issue before graduating high school—that’s about 1,450 students. Students with mental health problems often struggle with academics, have difficulty interacting with their teachers and peers, and can be disruptive in the classroom, affecting other students’ ability to focus and learn.

Although our district had recognized student mental health as a priority, we did not have the staff or the expertise needed to adequately address the needs of students who faced mental health issues.

 solution

Through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant, our district conducted a needs assessment across all elementary, middle, and high schools—looking at discipline rates, absenteeism, staffing levels for mental health services, student use of such services, and practices for linking students to community resources.

We then reviewed a range of evidence-based programs and ultimately selected the Healthy Minds program, to be implemented in our two middle schools, where the assessment showed the needs were most pressing. The program provides a mental health curriculum for students along with tools and training to help teachers and staff identify and address mental health issues.

To support this effort, we engaged Teen Success Outreach, a local organization offering mental health services for youth, to provide consultation and connect us with other relevant community resources.

 results

The district’s 68 middle school teachers and administrative staff have completed initial training through Healthy Minds, and 1,200 students have participated in activities and lessons through its curriculum.

Based on the thorough needs assessment, the school board approved the hiring of an additional school counselor to be shared between middle schools. From 2015 to 2016, the number of students seeking and receiving mental health services in the middle schools jumped 18 percent, and referrals to community services increased 13 percent. Teachers also reported feeling more confident in identifying and helping students who need services.

As a result of training received through Healthy Minds, Tommy’s English teacher referred him for in-school counseling, which led to a connection with a local psychiatrist who could provide the more intensive services he needs to succeed in school.

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“When one of my students fell behind and became withdrawn, I wasn’t quite sure how to approach him or his family. The Healthy Minds program equipped me to connect that student with the help he needs—I’m already seeing some positive changes in his behavior and attitude.” – Sue Becker, teacher, Johnson Middle School |
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| MORE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS NOW SEEK AND RECEIVE APPROPRIATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. |
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Sure, this is a newsletter, not a novel—and you want to keep it short and sweet to keep your reader’s attention. But if you need a bit more space, we’ve got you covered…

To add another page, just click in the last sentence of the sample story above this one and then press Ctrl+Enter.

This story and the mailer will move to the next page—and the mailer will automatically be in the right spot. You can then click back in the text on this page and add more.

 sustaining success

At the start of the 2016-17 school year, middle school principals sent letters to all families to explain the Healthy Minds program and the increased availability of mental health services. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Superintendent John Nichols presented first-year results of the program at the January 2017 school board meeting, after which members agreed to consider expanding funds for the program and to explore piloting it in the district’s most high-risk elementary school. Superintendent Nichols also worked with publishers of the Times-Almanac to run a feature story about the program and its impact.

An advisory panel is currently being formed of parents, teachers, administrators, students, and a representative from Teen Success Outreach to ensure input from both the school district and the community as this program grows and to develop champions for school mental health.

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“We knew students were not getting the mental health services they needed, but until we did the needs assessment, we didn’t realize where—and how big—the gaps were. That was a valuable process. And using a program that has been proven effective in schools like ours made it easier for everyone to get on board.” – Demetrius Jackson, principal, Wofford Middle School |
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