

Napa County Mental Health Board

The School Based Mental Health Services Needs Assessment and Stigma Reduction 2016 Work Group

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OBJECTIVE

The School Based Mental Health Services Needs Assessment and Stigma Reduction 2016 Work Group was established for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating Napa Valley Unified School District's (NVUSD) existing programs for school based mental health services and programs. Its objectives were to identify:

- Programs addressing existing student needs
- Potential multicultural, socio-emotional and behavioral health solutions to reducing mental health stigma on campus
- Formulate possible plans to increase funding, staffing and support to school based mental health services, enriching existing programs and extending services to high need schools

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates approximately one in five children age 13 – 18 have or will experience a severe mental health disorder, half by age 14. Half of students over age 14 with a mental illness drop out of high school.¹ Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. for youth ages 10-24, with an average of over 5240 attempts by youth grades 7-12.² In Napa County over the past ten years, 16 youth have died by suicide, at an average rate of two deaths per year.³

NVUSD is comprised of over 30 schools, serving more than 18,000 students in the communities of American Canyon, Napa City and Yountville. Approximately 10% of its students have disabilities or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Over 40% of the student body receives free or reduced fee meals, including breakfast, lunch, and for some, even after school snacks. According to KidsData⁴, Napa County public school enrollment is predominately Latino (54.2%) and Caucasion (30.6%). Over half of all Kindergarteners speak another language at home. The district has five high schools serving grades 9-12: American Canyon High School, Napa High School, New Technology High School, Valley Oak High School and Vintage High School. Napa Valley Independent Studies provides an alternative education setting for K – 12 students.

¹ <http://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/Children-MH-Facts-NAMI.pdf>

² https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2014-a.pdf

³ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/209/suicides-race/table#fmt=124&loc=339&tf=73,67,64,46,37,16,10&ch=7,11,8,10,9,73,219&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

⁴ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/36/publicschoolenrollment-race/table#fmt=451&loc=339&tf=88&ch=7,11,621,85,10,72,9,73&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

Shea Report, 2007

In 2007, at the request of Napa County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), Napa County Office of Education (NCOE) and NVUSD, Allen, Shea and Associates prepared a report called **School-Based Mental Health Services and Supports – Needs Assessment and Recommendations for Napa County**.⁵

The report found school based mental health programs to be lacking in quantity and quality, and mental health program funding to be fragmented and restrictive, perpetuating difficulties in treating children. It recommended NVUSD develop:

- School policies – to support a safe, supportive, healthy, crisis and drug free environment
- School-financed student support services – including culturally relevant, multidisciplinary team approaches to students impacted by negative home and community environments, food and housing insecurity, financial barriers to health services, disabilities and special needs
- Needs assessments process & classroom interventions to promote healthy social and emotional development and prevent learning disruptions
- School based wellness centers including mental health services
- Formal partnerships with local community based services and agencies
- Comprehensive Prevention and Early Intervention strategies including parent/family outreach, peer counseling and support, and curriculum based programs to work with at-risk and high needs youth in a consistent, supportive, evidence based manner

Despite those recommendations, KidsData statistics indicate many students in NVUSD still struggle with serious behavioral and mental health concerns. 32.6% of 9th graders and 42.7% of 11th graders reported using drugs or alcohol in the month prior to taking the surveys⁶; and 12.1% and 13.6% (respectively) reported using drugs or alcohol on their school campus in the past month.⁷ These figures are significantly higher than the statewide average.

Nearly 33% of Napa County 11th graders report feelings of depression⁸ and 17.5% seriously considered suicide.⁹ Meanwhile, over 60% of Napa County middle school and over 40% of high school staff reported student depression or mental health is a problem at school.¹⁰ There remains a clear need for school based youth mental health services in Napa for both middle and high school students.

With the signing of **Assembly Bill 3632**, all county Mental Health Departments were assigned responsibility for providing and paying for mental health related services for all special education students through state-mandated interagency collaboration between school districts and county mental health agencies. However, then California Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed that county funding in 2010.¹¹

⁵ http://www.allenshea.com/documents/SBMHFinalReport_December2007.pdf

⁶ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/587/any-drug-grade/table#fmt=809&loc=952,339,2&tf=81&ch=69,305,306,431,1142,1170,1169&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

⁷ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/590/any-drug-school-grade/table#fmt=812&loc=339,2&tf=81&ch=69,305,306,431,1142,1170,1169&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

⁸ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/662/depression-grade/table#fmt=943&loc=339,2&tf=81&ch=69,305,306,431,1142,1177,1176&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

⁹ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/1825/suicidal-ideation-grade/table#fmt=2294&loc=339,2&tf=81&ch=305,306,431,1142,1177,1176&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

¹⁰ <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/1823/student-depression-problem-staff-reported/table#fmt=2290&loc=339&tf=81&ch=1143,1144,1145,1146,1147,1148,1171,1172,1173,1174&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

¹¹ <http://www.uacf4hope.org/post/history-mental-health-services-students-disabilities>

In 2011, **Assembly Bill 114**¹² was signed into law, transferring responsibility and funding for educationally related mental health services, including residential services, from county mental health and child welfare departments to the school districts.

Under AB 114, funding is distributed by the California Department of Education directly to the **Special Education Local Planning Areas (SELPA)**s. The funds help cover the educational costs of all special education students requiring mental health services as determined by their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Napa County SELPA serves approximately 2529 students across 5 school districts and NCOE: NVUSD, St. Helena Unified School District, Calistoga Joint Unified School District, Howell Mountain Elementary School District and Pope Valley Unified School District.

The total local impact was approximately \$1.6 million in funding shifting from Napa County Mental Health services to meet student needs through local educational programs. Despite the NVUSD's new youth mental health responsibilities, some services and coordination continue to be provided in school settings by Napa's Mental Health Division and its contractors, which include Aldea Children and Family Services and Mentis. According to Napa's HHS, 1390 hours of specialty mental health services were provided at school sites to 196 unduplicated students.

However, two youth suicides in 2016 sparked a community forum at Redwood Middle School¹³, where 130 Spanish speaking residents and 100 English speaking residents asked about existing mental health resources and how to access them. The forum discussion also included topics like bullying and drug use. Representatives from Napa's HHS and school staff were present to address parent concerns. Although the residents felt supported, it was apparent more education and services were needed both in the community and on school campuses.

In September of 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 2246, mandating that all CA school districts create formal suicide prevention, intervention and follow-up plans for all middle and high school students. This bill will ensure students, families, school staff and administration are prepared to recognize youth in crisis and help intervene in a timely, appropriate way.

In light of the recent suicides and the mandate for school district suicide prevention planning, the Work Group sought to understand how the mental health of students is currently supported, identify ways to improve mental health support systems for youth and families in collaboration with mandated and planned NVUSD future efforts, and recommend ways to help bridge existing gaps in services and support.

METHODOLOGY

The Work Group spoke to key stakeholders in Napa County about existing school based mental health services and plans for future support, meeting in person with Napa County's HHS, NVUSD, NCOE, and two direct service providers contracted by NVUSD. The school district has done much to understand and address the needs of its students; and seeks to not only develop more robust middle school services going forward, but also to expand services to high school students as well.

EXISTING SERVICES & FUNDING

Overall, NVUSD supports student health with a broad spectrum of services based on the Continuum of Care Model, encompassing Promotion, Prevention, Treatment and Recovery.

¹² http://www.uacf4hope.org/sites/main/files/ucla_policy_brief_transition_of_ab_3632.pdf

¹³ http://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/community-forum-follows-in-wake-of-youth-suicides/article_114d1a83-69ac-5f30-bf7e-3f51aa9a95ae.html

Promotion

Promotion includes strategies to support behavioral health and resilience. In 2015, Napa Valley Education Foundation¹⁴ and the CA School Based Health Alliance (CSHA) helped secure a \$1.2 million Federal Middle School counseling grant from the US Dept of Education. Split into \$400,000 per year over three years, the grant covered the cost of creating Wellness Centers at four middle schools, and hiring both a half time social worker and a part time psychologist to improve school climate, reduce truancy rates, teach socio-emotional skills and address student mental health needs. At American Canyon Middle School, 75 students are seen daily, and 77 students receive ongoing services. At Harvest Middle School, 60 students are seen daily, and 175 students receive ongoing services.¹⁵ In March 2017, two more centers celebrated their official openings: Silverado Middle School and Redwood Middle School.

A tour of the new Silverado Middle School Wellness Center revealed why the centers are so effective at helping students navigate mental and physical health concerns. No matter the ailment, all students enter through one entrance, thus reducing the stigma associated with help seeking. Students are greeted by a caring receptionist and routed to appropriate staff. If wellness center staff deems it appropriate, they cross refer students between the nurse, counseling and social worker offices. Each office is well lit, with warm and welcoming furnishings and colors designed to further reduce the stigma and stress associated with clinical services. Between caring staff, a comforting environment, and coordinated care, students are now much more likely to refer each other to the wellness center than when services were more clinical, decentralized and less organized.

Beyond the wellness centers, NVUSD has embraced other practices to care for the whole child in the classroom.

Prevention

Prevention includes interventions to prevent or reduce the risk of developing mental and physical health issues. NVUSD has adopted PBIS¹⁶ methods to create a nurturing school environment. PBIS stands for Positive Behavior Intervention and Support. BEST stands for "Building Effective Schools Together" and is Napa Valley School district's adopted curriculum to implement PBIS. PBIS is a comprehensive, 3-tiered approach to implementing positive, supportive school culture through monitoring, screening and evaluation of its students:

- Tier One, School Wide: The general school population ([Tier 1: Schoolwide PBIS](#))
- Tier Two, Targeted: Students at risk ([Tier 2: Targeted PBIS](#))
- Tier Three, Intensive: Students with intensive or chronic behavioral and emotional problems ([Tier 3: Intensive PBIS](#))

PBIS and BEST program supports have more than paid for themselves in terms of empowering educators to better handle emotional and behavioral issues in the classroom, and improve students' overall self regulation and focus.

Treatment and Recovery

School wide support includes Youth Mental Health First Aid, Restorative Practices, and additional school counseling support which has contributed to a 75% reduction in suspensions and 95% reduction in expulsions over the last 7 years. NVUSD also has a solid MFT Intern/Trainee program, run by Michael Coughlin, Lorraine Crockford and Pam Walton of Special Education, which supervises and trains about 10 MFT interns each year. Then interns, placed in schools with limited resources, serve approximately 10 students each.

¹⁴ http://nvef.org/what_we_do/wellness

¹⁵ <http://www.nvusdwellness.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.nvusd.k12.ca.us/PBIS>

For youth with long term needs, academic and behavioral challenges outside of the norm, NVUSD performs assessments. Teaching staff and counselors form Student Success Teams to review changes in behavior and academic performance and plan intervention strategies. If adjustments fail to help the youth get back on track, youth may be referred for IEP eligibility. Over 3600 middle school students have been screened so far, with over 300 children referred by teachers for assessment. Approximately 10% have confirmed IEP needs, and at least 4% have moderate to serious mental health needs. Aldea brought on a therapist to cover mental health needs at four NVUSD middle schools – Harvest, American Canyon, Redwood and Silverado. Therapist time is capped at one day per school per week serving no more than 24 youth total. All other youth requiring services are case managed with NCOE and other service providers including Cope Family Center, Voices, and Parents Can.

The middle schools with Wellness Centers have experienced a noticeable improvement in School Climate according to the most recent California Health Kids Survey data. NVUSD attributes improvement in depression and anxiety scores to the coordinated care approach taken by the wellness centers. The centers' social workers case manage youth care, coordinating with families, educators, and direct service providers as needed to ensure treatment is appropriate, consistent and informed. As a result for example, Harvest has been able to see almost three times as many youth as in previous years when care was less organized and decentralized. NVUSD expects wellness center loads at other middle schools will continue increase as screening and assessment processes are further streamlined by social worker efforts. However, existing funding does not allow full time social workers exclusive to a single wellness center. Social workers must split their time between campuses. Additional support would allow NVUSD to hire more social workers and more efficiently care for students.

In addition to various grants, several funding streams also support school based mental health services.

Early & Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT)¹⁷ funding is a federal entitlement covering mandatory health services along with developmental and special needs services for children from birth through age 21 who meet Medicaid income eligibility requirements and Medi-Cal medical necessity criteria. Most Medi-Cal eligible youth have a recognized mental disorder or developmental challenge; and have been prescribed specific interventions to help overcome those barriers. Program services include mental health assessment and services including therapy, rehabilitation and life skills, crisis intervention and stabilization and family support to help youth improve and maintain mental health status.

Thanks to Prop 63, the **Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)** covers **Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI)** programs serving NVUSD students, including the Student Assistant Programs (SAPs):

- Napa County Office of Education's Court and Community Schools SAP help youth who for various reasons cannot attend school in their assigned school district. Programs include anger management, alcohol and drug abuse counseling, literacy and life skills, and counseling services.
- Up Valley PEI Project has created culturally responsive programs to reach its Spanish speaking population in St. Helena and Calistoga Elementary, Middle and High Schools.
- The American Canyon SAP uses universal prevention strategies like Positive Behavioral Intervention (BEST) and Positive Behavioral Intervention Strategies (PBIS), general counseling and student support. For high needs students, case management and referrals are available along with other specialized services.

¹⁷ <http://napa.networkofcare.org/mh/library/article.aspx?id=1398>

These programs have promising results, including improved attendance, reduced risky behaviors, increased cultural awareness and pride and deeper positive family and community relations.

Up Valley Family Centers provides a variety of services to families in Calistoga and St Helena. Its on-site therapy services in the schools are primarily funded by the school district. It works with a multidisciplinary Core Team of administrators, school psychologist, a drug and alcohol specialist from Aldea Children and Family Services, therapists from Mentis, and staff from the Teen Center in Calistoga. The Core Team meets twice a month to identify student referrals and plan around individual student needs. Approximately 150 – 200 students are referred for services.

Calistoga teachers utilize Behavioral and Educational Strategies for Teachers (BEST) to identify student behavioral challenges and appropriate interventions and resources. Calistoga school therapists are on site 4 days a week, provided by Mentis. St. Helena schools are staffed by private therapists with irregular office hours, while Howell Mountain Elementary and Pope Valley Elementary schools are staffed by private therapists on an as-needed basis as determined by teachers and the one full time school psychologist serving those schools.

Up Valley's PEI Project has three components:

- Group mentoring programs which use a prevention curriculum designed for middle and high school students to develop pride in self and culture, respect for one's self, family and community and positive future outcomes. 98 students participated in FY 14-15.
- 40-hour Parent leadership program. 6 parents participated in FY 14-15.
- Promotoras Program, where volunteers receive mental health first aid training and disseminate mental health education, connecting youth and families to local services. 353 volunteers were trained; and made 8 referrals to mental health services in FY 14-15.

In addition to stable funding concerns, the schools face challenges finding culturally appropriate, bilingual therapists to serve the largely Latino population. Student needs include stress and anger management, coping skills, and self care routines incorporating healthy eating, sleep and exercise.

Mentis, a local direct service provider support youth, families and educators throughout Napa County. Middle and high school teens dealing with depression, violence and family conflicts often struggle with emotional, behavioral and academic challenges. Typically, middle school youth must deal with issues around bullying, self image and esteem, risky behaviors and increasingly, suicidal ideation. High school issues include bullying (by social media), relationship issues, pregnancy, truancy, gangs and substance abuse. Mentis collaborates with other agencies to provide therapy groups for parents. There are seven groups in Napa, one in American Canyon and two in St. Helena. Mentis also works with school staff, conducting a mindfulness program for teachers in addition to teaching them how to recognize mental health issues in light of increasing suicidal ideation concerns.

Mentis contracts with NVUSD to provide bilingual, on campus support, counseling and therapy for youth by way of therapists co-located with the NCOE in middle and high schools. In Calistoga Middle/High School and Alternative School, students may see therapists regardless of their insurance coverage. Mentis also counsels students one day a week at Howell Mountain Elementary. Counseling is usually by appointment but walk-ins are accommodated when possible. Each therapist is extremely visible throughout the school, assigned to two classrooms, mobilized during crisis interventions, working closely with school Resource Officers, in addition to offering private counseling to 5 youth per day and group counseling to cohorts of 7-12 youth. Most students are referred by family or faculty, but occasionally students will self-refer. Students over age 12 may seek help without parental consent;

while younger students must obtain parental permission. Mentis also counsels youth dealing with substance abuse, violence and risky behaviors at alternative high schools Liberty and Chamberlin.

In addition to internal evaluations, when tracking student mental health improvement, Mentis takes into account teacher evaluations based on attendance, homework and grades. Over the past two years, Mentis believes it has seen a positive impact in stigma reduction due to more self-referrals, more Latino/a students served and more gang-related referrals.

Despite progress, there are challenges. There are waiting lists for student mental health services. Vintage High school wanted group therapy services, but lacked funding. Schools need more efficient assessment tools to differentiate students with serious mental health issues from those facing situational challenges, in order to better prioritize appointments and provide appropriate services. Summer services could help support youth and families when school is not in session, as Mentis offices aren't convenient to students and families. Community mental health education is another challenge, as stigma reduction is more of an issue with parents than students. Finally, alternative therapies like Animal Assisted Therapy could be extremely useful in reaching youth, but inadequate financial support for such work exists.

Aldea Children and Family Services has operated in Napa for nearly 45 years. The agency provides professional mental health, child welfare and support services and outpatient therapy clinics in Napa and Solano counties. Aldea once co-located therapists in more than 30 schools in Napa County, but lost funding for many of those therapists when schools took on more financial responsibility from the County and stopped funding external clinicians.

Currently it runs the Aldea Day Adolescent Program for Treatment (ADAPT) program in partnership with NVUSD, to help improve the emotional and academic functioning of special education-qualified high school students (9th through 12th grades) with IEPs who are referred by the NVUSD SELPAs. Services include crisis intervention, psychiatric assessment & medication management, individual and group therapy, family therapy as needed, and resource assistance.

Napa County Office of Education (NCOE) in collaboration with Aldea Children and Family Services has trained staff from Napa schools on mental health first aid, to help educators recognize and appropriately respond to symptoms of mental distress and crisis. It also focuses on providing direct services to students and their families, as well as staff support.

NCOE's Strategic Plan¹⁸ through December 2016 included key goals which coincide with NVUSD efforts. One goal was to develop meaningful partnerships with school districts. NCOE has successfully worked with NVUSD on Local Control Accountability Planning (LCAP) funding compliance and to improve student learning, review current student mental health programs and create additional programs to engage and educate youth and their families regarding mental health information, local services and resources.

Another goal was to increase program staffing (e.g., mental health counseling and a licenses social worker) to better connect school programs with parents, outside partnering agencies, and mental health counselors. NVUSD now has additional social workers and counseling services available through the middle school wellness centers.

NCOE also sought to help with reducing truancy and increasing parent engagement and graduation rates. NVUSD reports that getting parents to attend school informational events can be challenging due to work and responsibility conflicts, but family engagement is crucial to helping provide a stable environment and coordinated approaches to social emotional and behavioral issues at home and at

¹⁸ <https://www.napacoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Strategic-Plan-2015-16-FINAL1.pdf>

school. The successes of existing SAP programs serving Napa County high school students are a promising indicator of the potential of high school wellness centers to improve youth outcomes.

NVUSD continues to collaborate with NCOE on ways to improve the education and health outcomes of Napa Valley youth, and looks forward to more successful projects in the coming years.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As evidenced by the recent suicides and the resulting Redwood Middle School community meeting, Napa County Spanish and English speaking families alike are concerned about the mental health of their children. California State is equally concerned about suicidal ideation, and has passed recent legislation to ensure youth are better supported at school. NVUSD, concerned about doing more for their children, have successfully collaborated with NCOE, Napa Valley Education Foundation and CA School Based Health Alliance secured funding to open wellness centers on four of its middle school campuses to support students. NVUSD continues to work collaboratively with NCOE to develop programs which can inform the community and educate youth about mental health issues and resources.

However, there are barriers to expanding existing services and creating new school based mental health supports for Napa County youth. NVUSD anticipates \$12 million in budget cuts over the next two years due to declining enrollment in public schools. Its existing three year grant from the US Department of Education ends next year, putting existing school wellness center budgets in jeopardy. School staff and administration positions have been cut, which has resulted in resource cuts, including the Red Book, the administration's guide to NVUSD approved community services for families requiring additional health and educational resources and community support. Decreased budgets have resulted in the school district's inability to hire additional wellness center staff and counseling support despite the growing student demand. Existing staff have basic screening evaluation systems in place, but without additional funding cannot work to streamline those systems to better manage case loads and more efficiently meet student needs. With the exception of SAP work in high schools, there is very little mental health support for high school students, despite growing needs.

In order to meet these challenges, NVUSD requires continued assistance:

- Supporting school based Wellness Centers, which not only work to reduce the stigma around help seeking but also provide physical and mental health information, resources and direct services to students and their families. Money should flow to the Napa Valley Education Foundation, which funnels contributions directly to the Wellness Centers. Monies donated to NVUSD by comparison are not typically earmarked, and routed to a variety of needs.
- Hiring additional staff including volunteers, counselors, clinicians and administration to ensure services are well coordinated between case managers, health care providers, clinicians, systems of care and families
- Providing Youth Mental Health First Aid training to staff and administrators to ensure potential issues can be recognized, assessed, screened and treated before reaching crisis level
- Creating a peer network of support and services for youth and family to find counseling and resources as needed
- Funding and creating high school wellness centers to address youth health concerns

Thus it may be helpful to consider short term steps to close gaps, as well as long term solutions to meet sustainability concerns.

To meet funding needs, the **California School Based Health Alliance** remains a valuable partner interested in helping to convene stakeholder meetings to establish needs and service priorities, identify potential grants and donations, and assist in completing RFP and grant applications. NVUSD has successfully worked with CA SBHA in the past, including securing funding for the middle school wellness centers, and continues to pursue SBHA support for other projects.

To reduce mental health stigma at home, in the community and at school, **San Francisco Suicide Prevention's Youth Risk Reduction** program offers evidence based peer curriculum and school staff mental health education in suicide prevention techniques to help youth and families through crisis. SFSP also operates a 24/7 crisis line to answer all kinds of questions from youth and families. Topics commonly addressed include substance abuse, bullying, mental health concerns, treatment and facility resources, suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression.

For high school students and faculty who want to set up some kind of support for youth until formal wellness centers can be funded, clubs and organizations which work directly with school administration, in line with NVUSD policies, may provide much needed peer support. **LETS/Bring Change to Mind** is an evidence-based school club model empowering youth to talk about and educate each other on mental health issues, reducing stigma and encouraging help seeking behaviors in conjunction with school policies and parental support.

OUTLET/Adolescent Counseling Services is a Bay Area organization which trains educators and parents how to navigate LGBTQQ issues in a caring, supportive way with their youth. Their information workshops are a valuable way for educators and parents to quickly gather tools to hold meaningful conversations with and about queer and questioning youth.

Many youth grappling with suicidal thoughts just want to be heard, but sometimes finding the words to express how they feel is difficult. **Art with Impact** is an evidence-based program teaching educators how to help youth find their voice through video projects. Youth learn to write, produce, direct and edit their mental health messages into short films with the help of supportive faculty trained in holding mental health conversations and creative expression. For those more comfortable with performance arts, **Youth Speaks** is a performance program teaching youth how to write and perform poetry to educate others about their experiences and advocate for change in a positive, uplifting way. Other programs, like **Today's Future Sound** founded by Dr. Elliot Gann to teach youth how to produce their own music, especially helpful for those who cannot find words to express their feelings.