


Building A System to Promote Mental Health and Boost Learning

Laupāhoehoe Community Public Charter School – Laupāhoehoe, HI



WHY PRIORITIZE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH?

Located along the rural central coast of the island of Hawaii, Laupāhoehoe Community Public Charter School (LCPCS) is an important education and health hub for the Native Hawaiian community it serves. The only school in a district spanning 140 square miles, LCPCS was founded in 2012 through a community-driven process to establish local governance and to address the socioeconomic challenges faced by children and families in the surrounding community. Currently 70% of LCPCS's student population is categorized as low-income, and approximately 40% of secondary students have been pre-identified as high need due to a number of factors including test scores, attendance, mental health status, and family environment. Although the school was founded with a strong commitment to overall community well-being, limited resources have constrained school staff's ability to offer an array of robust health and wellness services that meet the social and emotional needs of students and staff. Given the strong link between student mental health and academic success, staff wanted to focus on not only physical, but also mental health promotion and early intervention in their school.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- K-12 grade
- 252 students
- 69% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

ETHNICITY

- 36% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 22% Caucasian
- 27% Filipino or Other Asian
- 9% Portuguese
- 3% Latino
- 2% Multiracial or Other

ACTION STEPS

To address the needs of students at Laupāhoehoe, staff sought to build a multi-pronged wellness system for the school, with a strong emphasis on mental health. A small Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant was critical to building the infrastructure for integrating social and emotional learning in the school environment. First, the grant enabled the purchase of an early warning system (EWS) database, Pale Liko, a tool that consolidates student information, including enrollment, academic, demographic, and health data, into one system. This tool enabled school counselors and administrative staff to better screen for and identify students who would benefit from mental health supports. The integrated data tool allows staff to create more accurate school profiles, as well as run preliminary screens of students against academic, demographic, behavioral, and/or health indicators, such as absenteeism, poor test scores, and low family support, that are associated with higher risk for behavioral problems or poor future academic success. The grant also paid for consultation and staff trainings to effectively use the EWS database. Once students have been identified through this screening process, campus space was needed for additional assessment and appropriate interventions, such as group and individual therapy. Thus, the grant funds were also used to develop and equip the new Kipuka Health and Wellness Room, open to both students and staff. The project director, in partnership with the school's counseling and administrative staff, promoted the availability of the health and wellness office to the school and larger community, including holding town hall meetings and making announcements through the school newsletter. As the wellness office becomes incorporated into the school, LCPCS plans to monitor student and staff participation in wellness office services. Informal staff and student

surveys as well as discussions at staff meetings will provide feedback helpful to refining use of the EWS database, the school's screening and assessment process, and wellness office services to assure that the mental health needs of students and staff are addressed.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan grant allowed LCPCS to establish a school infrastructure, including data systems and assessment procedures, to better address students' mental health needs. The grant provided important leverage for the school to seek and obtain additional funding from local foundations, including a grant from the Hawaii Community Foundation, to sustain the the mental health services and expand programming at the wellness center. Teachers and staff have also gained skills to utilize the EWS database, identify and track students needing mental health support, assess their needs, and implement appropriate prevention and intervention services. The project has contributed to a positive shift towards a healthy school environment, creating space on campus for students to receive social and emotional supports needed to help them succeed in the classroom. The project director noted quantitative reductions in suspension and referral rates since implementation began. Survey data has also indicated increased staff well-being, reduction of behavioral problems among students, and a strong positive response from parents and families.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

An initial challenge faced by the LCPCS team was identifying additional funds to sustain the program after the grant ended. Documenting positive

impact through the EWS database and wellness office were critical tools that the project director used in her efforts to cultivate commitment among school leadership and local foundations to continue financing the EWS and services. These efforts paid off when one administrator became the EWS/wellness office champion, successfully seeking and securing funds to continue mental health services.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Investing time and resources into building school-wide infrastructure – as well as professional development – to collect and analyze data on student mental health needs was critical to building capacity for systematic planning and informed decision making. Utilizing these data and assessment tools allowed staff to better advocate for resources and convince administration and local foundations about the need for mental health services and supports through the project. Cultivating buy-in and backing from the school's administrative teams was critical not only to implementing the project, but to sustaining the mental health supports over time.

“When administrators are in full support...[it] sends messages to the school community [about] the importance of these types of mental health programs.”

-Project Director

For More Information:
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The Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant Program is funded by Kaiser Permanente and implemented in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program. Action Plan Grants support schools to create healthy school environments for students and staff. This case study was developed based on the school's responses to the Action Plan Grants year-end survey.

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