

WASD Mental Health Task Force School Board Update



March 13, 2023

Dr. Jessica Lengle, Director of Pupil Services

Timeline of Work Done by MHTF

- July 5, 2022 - Director of Pupil Services met with representatives from COCA and Caron to review WASD PA Youth Survey (“PAYS”) data and eSAP/SAP data
- Comparisons were made in relation to county and state data
- Developed collaborative approach for MHTF to review data in 6 categories:
 - ATOD Use and Access
 - Antisocial Behavior
 - Community and School Climate and Safety
 - Social and Emotional Health
 - Systemic Factors
 - Risk and Protective Factors

Timeline of Work Done by MHTF

- July 11, 2022 - Meeting facilitated by Director of Pupil Services and representatives from COCA and Caron
- Shared individual team members' background and purpose in participation
- Developed long-term goals for the group
- Worked in small groups to determine strengths and needs of WASD youth from PAYS data
- Created a draft executive summary of PAYS data
- Using identified needs, chose parent trainings to be offered by the Cook Center during the 22-23 academic year

Timeline of Work Done by MHTF

- September 27, 2022 - Meeting facilitated by Director of Pupil Services and representative from Caron
- Finalized PAYS executive summary to post to WASD website
- Celebrated supports and services related to student mental and behavioral health already offered to WASD students
- Developed 3 areas of focus for improvement for the WASD community
 - Educating and supporting students
 - Educating and supporting parents
 - Educating and supporting staff

Timeline of Work Done by MHTF

- December 7, 2022
 - Meeting scheduled and all but 4 people stated they were unable to attend
 - In lieu of meeting, survey was issued to allow for individual/group input with open-ended questions to support meeting agenda
- December 2022 - February 2023 - Small group meetings with Dr. Lengle and stakeholders to discuss survey results and hear additional input; research completed on professional services to potentially support District needs
- March 2023 - MHTF Recommendations presented to WASD School Board of Directors

Long Term Goals of Task Force

- Evaluate District data related to student behavioral health needs
- Develop and maintain inventory of student supports and services
- Bi-annually review data to ensure it aligns with supports and services available
- Gather periodically to respond to acute, whole group student behavioral health needs

WASD School Board of Directors Strategic Plan Related to Student Mental Health Needs

- Establish an advisory committee to interpret data, identify needs and provide recommendations for improvement
- Create an annually reviewed action plan to document initiatives
- Consider use of professional service to identify needs
- Create a K-12 SEL/Mental Health comprehensive curriculum

Current Supports & Services

- Student Assistance Program - K-12
Partnership with the Caron Foundation and Tower Health
- Student Assistance Program Support Groups
- Full-time social worker - K-12 - partnership with Tower Health
- Behavior Support Specialist in JSHS Emotional Support classroom
- School-based counseling through Empowerment Behavioral Health

Current Supports & Services

- Cook Center - Mental Health Series
Virtual parent trainings and teacher PD
- Cook Center - Parent Coaching
- Aavidum Club - 7-12
- Hope Squad - 7-12
- K-6 school counselor lessons (scheduled throughout the year)
- 7-8 school counselor lessons (scheduled throughout the year)
- 9-12 school counselor lessons (as needed on various topics throughout the year)

Current Supports & Services

- School Police Officer - K-12
- Wyomissing and West Reading police presence in all three buildings at various times and at various school sponsored events
- Health class curriculum contains units on mental health and behavioral health
- Weekender Program; monitoring of additional supports for school lunch fees
- Body & Mind Connection - physical education course
- Safe2Say
- Red Ribbon week K-6 participation

Ongoing Sources of Data to Review

- PAYS - every other year; odd years
- Individual student surveys twice a year for 5-12
- Parent surveys of eSAP group needs K-4
- SAP data for referrals, assessments and recommendations
- School-based counseling participation

Mental Health Stigma

Area of Focus #1

- Develop a K-12 menu for in-class mental health breaks
 - determine age-appropriate times for these to occur
- Consider organizing a community-wide health campaign with the Wyomissing Area public library and/or other organizations
- Create opportunities in the K-4 building to normalize mental health services and supports - rebrand SAP

Parental Knowledge of Age Appropriate Behaviors

Area of Focus #2

- Continue partnership with Cook Center to provide mental health education for families
- Partner with COCA to host a Strengthening Families Program at WASD
- Run Teens & Technology program annually for students and parents in grades 5-8
- Increased social media use to advertise parent offerings; consider ways to incentivize participation

Bullying and Depression/Suicide

Area of Focus #3

- Expand advertised suicide/mental health hotlines
- Continue youth mediation program and Hope Squad - work to increase participation
- Increase Flight Team membership through participation in PrePare trainings offered by NASP
- Annually review WASD Crisis Intervention Support and Postvention Manual
- Provide evidence-based suicide prevention training to school staff

Stress and Pressure

Area of Focus #4

- Provide parent training on stress and anxiety in children and adolescents
- Identify at-risk youth through universal mental health screenings at developmental milestones
- Consider partnership with professional agency to ensure K-12 SEL curriculum is comprehensive and spiraling throughout a WASD student's career; ensure topics specific to WASD are adequately addressed (ie. sleep habits)

Lack of Access to Mental Health Providers and Resources

Area of Focus #5

- Reorganize social work services - 7-12
- Assign District Homeless Liaison responsibilities to Director of Pupil Services
- Continue to promote school-based counseling services - after reviewing data of enrollment this year, consider developing a fund for students who are unable to provide the copay for services
- Based on training received, identify school staff as 'Mental Health Ambassadors'
- Gather regular input from families and students on behavioral health needs

Bias and Cultural Factors

Area of Focus #6

- Create visual artifacts that convey anti-bias and affirmation for all groups
- Partner with Empowerment Behavioral Health to run intensive groups outside of school hours to promote diversity and affirmation
- Provide high-quality diversity training for all teachers, counselors and administrators - develop specific protocols for responding to hate speech and discrimination

Poverty

Area of Focus #7

- Continue partnership with Helping Harvest to run Weekender Program in all schools
- Increase advertisement of community supports
- Provide staff training on ACEs and their impact on student well-being
- Advertise free/reduced lunch program with more frequency and provide support for families to complete application
- Support families in need with funding to participate in school-based counseling

Budgetary Implications

- **Professional Service** to identify mental health needs through reviewing district data and stakeholder input and provide recommendations for areas of improvement
- **Fund** to support providing additional opportunities for students through Empowerment Behavioral Health
- **Professional Employee** to Support WASD student/family behavioral health needs

Professional Service Partnership

- Dr. Jolene Arasz - Clinical Psychologist and author who consults with schools from elementary to graduate level programs providing mental health education to all stakeholders. Dr. Arasz uses Control Theory as the basis of all of her work in academic settings. Her focus is to provide others with an understanding of their mental health and anxiety, as well as provide preventative strategies.
- Book - *Why On Earth Do I feel This Way: Understanding anxiety and mental health through control theory*

What would Dr. Arasz provide for WASD?

Consultation Services (approx. 10 hours) \$3000

- Reviewing schools' current strengths/needs
- Meeting with Stakeholders
- Includes Follow-up Consultation and Recommendations for Improvement/Program Modifications

Curriculum Development for K-6 and 7-12 SEL \$8500

- Includes informational/structured material for each school.
- Lessons can be extended or modified as necessary, depending on class/student needs.
- Lessons are tailored to age cohorts.
- Lessons are based on evidence-based research, incorporating educational, science-based information, along with cognitive-behavioral approaches for both in the moment and preventative anxiety management.
- Lessons can also be integrated into different class curriculums, particularly the arts and physical education.

Professional Development on Comprehensive Wellness and Sustainability Programs - prices vary based on identified needs

Fund to Support EBH Partnership

- Provide students in need with assistance to pay private insurance co-pays - \$10,000
 - would be for a short-term period while public insurance is sought and/or based on a tiered level of support
- Funding for certified professional staff from EBH to run groups on topics outside of the academic day to support student needs - \$5,000

Professional Employee

- Position would be unique to WASD student needs and would be created following recommendations from MHTF and Dr. Arasz
- Duties would include, but not be limited to:
 - Support referrals to in-school and outside behavioral health programs
 - Conduct family needs assessments
 - Promote parental/guardian involvement in schools
 - Act as community school liaison
 - Support direct instruction of SEL skills
 - Assist with determining barriers to school attendance

Next Steps

- Provide additional information on professional consultant to the school board of directors in next Friday's update
 - Bring contract for services for approval at March 27th school board meeting
- Work with EBH to develop a contract/schedule for services, upon school board approval
- Further develop needs related to professional employee job description
- Solidify action plan to include due dates and progress updates

Questions?