

THANKFULNESS CHALLENGE

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my nephew
AUGUST

Strength & Resiliency

The Hortonville Area School District's
journey to mental wellness

The Hortonville Area School District has much to be proud of. The district was designated as the first model professional learning community (PLC) district in the state of Wisconsin. Teachers have identified and aligned standards for student learning, collaborated with grade-level and cross-district teams, and collected and analyzed student data on common formative assessments.

The district's focus on academics is also apparent in its mission statement: "Our community ensures every student learns at the highest level." But in order for students to learn at the highest level, each student needs to feel emotionally safe.

That's why district leaders were alarmed when they reviewed their student data from the

2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The results were concerning — 12.8 percent of Hortonville students reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months.

School leaders took action during the fall of 2014 and met with several agencies in the Fox Valley area to formulate a comprehensive, collaborative K-12 program to address mental health challenges and promote mental wellness. The district wanted to provide support in three main ways: prevention/education for students, parents and staff; identification via K-12 student screening; intervention or on-site therapy. The school district's mental health partners — Catalpa Health, NAMI Fox Valley and Samaritan Counseling — became partners with Hortonville and signed on with a four-year commitment.



Support for Students and Staff

Highlights from the first year of the Hortonville Area School District's mental health support program:

- 160 students in the district received therapy on site.
- E3 hotline was set up and is used frequently by parents to request services.
- There were 1,340 mental health therapist and student sessions last school year.
- Students in every building have access to therapy at their school.
- Each school in the Hortonville Area School District is licensed as a mental health clinic.
- Last school year, all students in grades 8-12 were able to be screened for depression, anxiety, suicide ideation/attempt and alcohol/other drug substance abuse.
- 16 percent of students that were screened were referred for additional services. Results included:
 - Increased student attendance throughout the school year for students receiving services;
 - 61 percent decrease in disciplinary actions for students receiving services; and
 - 71 percent of students receiving services felt "significantly or somewhat improved" as reported during their therapy sessions throughout the year.
- The NAMI teen support group that meets weekly has increased in membership.
- Training for all staff has included: Mental Health 101 and Recovery 101, ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and Trauma Sensitive Schools.
- There is a focus on positive messaging at the middle schools and implementation of Sources of Strength at Hortonville High School.



Dr. Heidi Schmidt, Hortonville District Administrator, stated that the primary goals of the school-based mental wellness program are to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health and allow on-site student screening and therapy access for all students. In addition, the program provides teachers with information and strategies related to student mental health and empowers students to look at their sources of strength (coping skills, grit, and perseverance) during difficult times.

■ Educate, Engage and Empower

The Hortonville Area School District's mental health program, which was named by Hortonville High

School students, is called E3 — Educate, Engage and Empower. The program was implemented during the fall of 2015 and has produced positive results and outcomes for students and the Hortonville community.

Through the partnerships with its community mental health providers, students in every school building have access to therapy and each school in the district is licensed as a mental health clinic. In its first year, the E3 program provided on-site therapy to 160 students and held a total of 1,340 mental health sessions with students. All students in grades 8-12 were screened for depression, anxiety, suicide ideation/attempt and alcohol/other drug substance abuse — 16 percent of students who were

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screened were referred to additional services.

The district has also instituted staff training sessions and student support programs, including a teen support group and a program focused on bringing together students and staff called Sources of Strength.

“Sources of Strength focuses on building resiliency skills through protective factors students have in their lives,” said Hortonville High School Principal Todd Timm. “The focus on trusted adults, mentors, and positive friends to name a few has staff members building on strengths with students and developing action steps in areas that need additional support. The appeal of building resiliency through positive messaging and messages of hope and help has been a great benefit to our students and staff.”

One sophomore student added, “Sources of Strength helps me com-

municate better with my peers about their mental health and possibly make them feel better about getting help if they are struggling.”

Wendy Neyhard, director of student services, was instrumental in formulating the E3 program and bringing initiatives like Sources of Strength to Hortonville High School. She said the district mental health program is focused on prevention.

“Through the implementation of upstream prevention approaches, our goal is to focus on strengths, resiliency and connectedness to prevent crisis,” Neyhard said.



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Looking Ahead

Some of the future goals for the program include expanding screenings to all students in grades 5-12, revising therapy times at each building based on student need, providing additional staff training, and continuing outreach to parents.



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Greenfield School District
Director of Human Resources and General Counsel

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National Children's Mental Health Week

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has designated May 4 as National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day. More than 1,100 communities and 160 national collaborating organizations and federal programs across the country participate in community events, youth educational programs, health fairs, art exhibits, and social networking campaigns in observance of Awareness Day. Each year, a national event takes place in Washington, D.C., to complement these local activities. The event, Awareness Day 2017: "Partnering for Help and Hope," will focus on the importance of integrating behavioral health and primary care for children, youth, and young adults with mental and/or substance use disorders. *For more information, visit www.samhsa.org.*



▶ Watch a DPI-produced video at:
<https://goo.gl/RquUu5>



Although there are aspects of the program the district hopes to expand upon, school leaders report feeling empowered by the district's mental health program. Instead of searching

for answers, Timm said he can provide solutions and options to parents and students.

"The E3 program has allowed me to have conversations of support

with families in need of assistance for their son or daughter," Timm said. "Instead of a phone call to a parent where I am limited in what we can offer for mental wellness assistance, I have the ability to reference our program and encourage parents to consider the option."

The district has received attention for its work from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). State Superintendent Tony Evers visited the Hortonville Area School District in December to learn about the district's journey. Dr. Evers has also referenced the district's work as the DPI advocates for funding for school mental health supports in the state budget. ■

For more information on the Hortonville Area School District's mental health program, visit www.hasd.org/e3/ or visit <https://goo.gl/RquUu5> to view a video produced by the Department of Public Instruction.

