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# **Mental Health Matters: Improving access to care within Riverside School District January – March 2023**

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**APRIL 17, 2023**

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**Riverside School District  
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# Mental Health Matters

First quarter: January through March 31, 2023 Summary

The district counseling team continues to prioritize the program activities outlined in Grant ID 38311: School Mental Health & Safety and Security as awarded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) while integrating these activities into the MultiTiered System of Supports (MTSS) that include:

- (a) continued integration of the team within the school culture and expansion of the program offerings by team members based upon identified student, family, building, and district priorities
- (b) continued investigation of sustainable funding
- (c) supporting policy revisions/development and implementation to assure compliance with current legislative and educational requirements
- (d) coordinating with local partners/agencies
- (e) increasing access to data to inform decision-making

## ***Key Objectives***

- (a) continued integration within the school culture and expansion of the role for each Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) promoting health
- (b) securing sustainable funding for LPCs (ex. Medical Assistance (MA) provider status; School Based Access Program (SBAP) billing for Special Education students)

## ***Action Steps***

1. Nicole Brush (Jr/Sr HS), Jacob Herber (East), and Samantha Valente (West) have established a daily presence in their respective schools, with communication among leadership, staff, students, and families that facilitates the early identification of at-risk students and provides immediate therapeutic interventions. Student/counselor matching is also arranged based upon the identified need, and LPCs travel to assure timely access to mental health services.
2. As routine referrals for mental health services are received they are assigned the most appropriate resource within the continuum (e.g. LPC, outpatient, CSBBH, etc.). Urgent or emergency referrals are seen immediately.

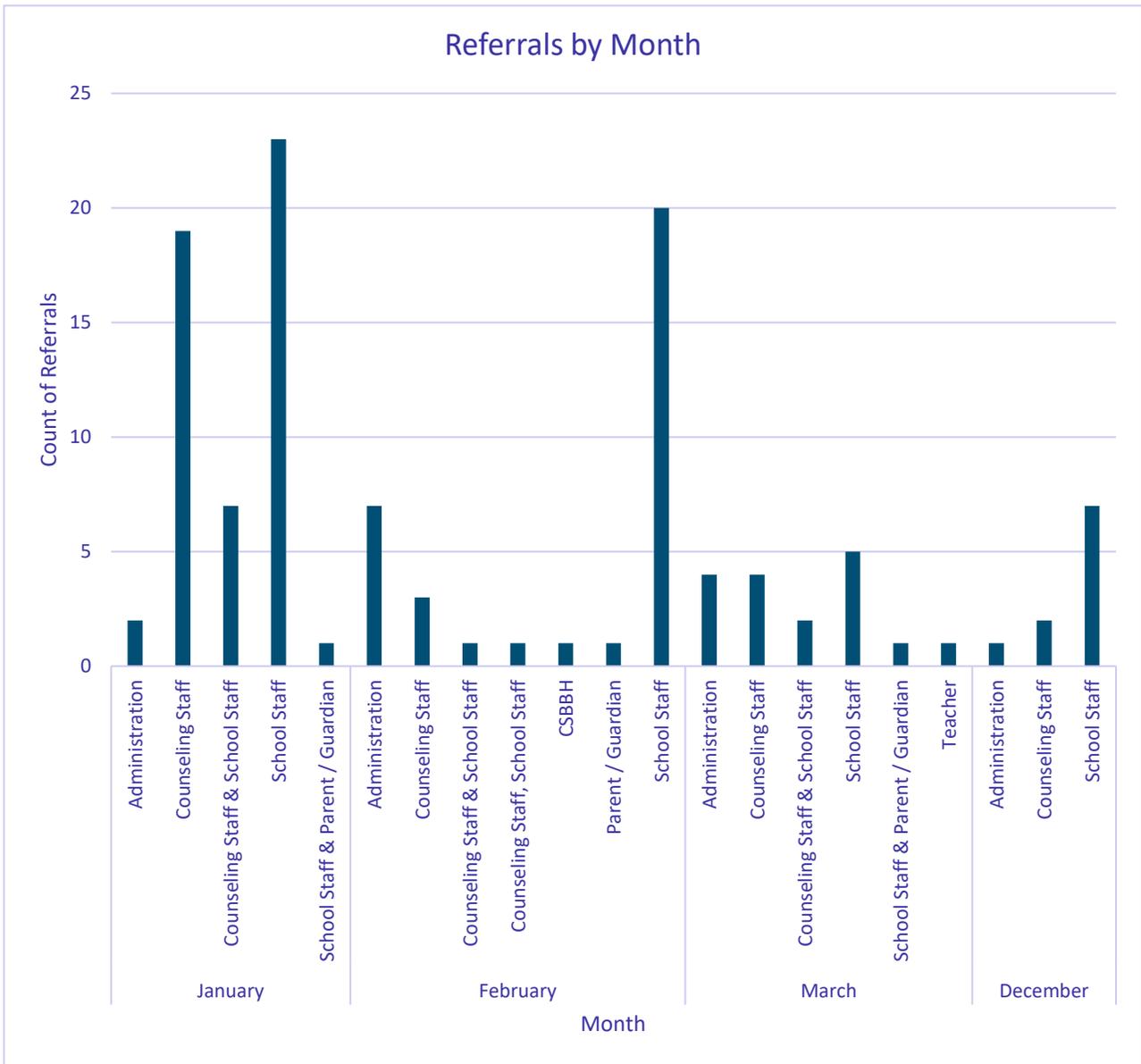
## ***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Although initial target was a decreased number of referrals to Out Patient services provided by LIU18 (130 during 2021/2022 school year), the proactive approach to the identification of at-risk students and the streamlined referral process has allowed the partnership between Riverside and LIU18 to expand our continuum of care. As of February 2023 there are three clinicians and a

Physician Assistant (PA) who provide therapeutic intervention and onsite medication prescribing and monitoring within RSD as part of the LIUs Out Patient Mental Health license, improving access and removing barriers for students and families needing this level of care.

2. Three LPCs are targeted for enrollment with PA Medical Assistance to provide billable “Social Work and Counseling Services” under the School Based Access Program (SBAP) during the next quarterly opportunity as prescribed by MD within their special education plans.
3. Summary of referral data December 2022 through March 2023 follows, noting referral count and source each month, as currently captured:

<b>January</b>	52
Administration	2
Counseling Staff	19
Counseling Staff & School Staff	7
School Staff	23
School Staff & Parent / Guardian	1
<b>February</b>	34
Administration	7
Counseling Staff	3
Counseling Staff & School Staff	1
Counseling Staff, School Staff	1
CSBBH	1
Parent / Guardian	1
School Staff	20
<b>March</b>	17
Administration	4
Counseling Staff	4
Counseling Staff & School Staff	2
School Staff	5
School Staff & Parent / Guardian	1
Teacher	1
<b>December</b>	10
Administration	1
Counseling Staff	2
School Staff	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	113



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4. LPCs enrolled as HealthChoices/MA service providers within RSD: individual practitioner requests sent 2/23/2023, with consistent service description to follow. Letter of support provided by Barb Durkin, Single County Authority (SCA) director for Lackawanna/Susquehanna County and NBHCC Board member. The Program Development and Network committee of NBHCC has pended our request as we remain responsive to their requests for information about this network expansion designed to improve access to needed mental health services within the natural environment of the school.

**Key Objective**

- (c) supporting policy revisions/development and implementation (e.g. RSD *Intervention and School Crisis Response Plan*) to assure compliance with current legislative and educational requirements

**Action Steps**

1. On 2/13/2023 the School Board approved the updated *Intervention and School Crisis Response Plan*, inclusive of suicide prevention awareness, and procedures and protocols related to intervention and postvention.
2. On 2/13/2023 Kathy Wallace and Mike Nelson of Northeast Suicide Prevention Initiative (NSPI) delivered 2-hour suicide awareness/an overview for gatekeeper training for all staff in attendance at Act 80 day.
3. Additional presentation this date included “Health and Wellness Session” by Harry Armstrong, acknowledging the rewards of physical activity to both health and education. The practice of yoga and mindfulness was presented to staff as opportunities to expand health and wellness within the district, inclusive of younger students and staff that will begin 4/4/2023.
4. Trauma informed approach plan began with staff survey distribution 1/30/2023. Results from 90 respondents were shared with all district staff on 2/17/2023, noting that:

The majority (91%) acknowledge that a trauma sensitive approach:

- Is different from the “universal supports” currently used in your buildings
- Would add significant value to existing approaches and is consistent and compatible with existing approaches and would be helpful in meeting the needs of students *and staff*

The majority (80%) noted that while schools operate well day-to-day, opportunities for improvement in the following areas were identified:

- Supporting staff in varied positions
- Training, skill development, and resources to adopt new approaches (trauma sensitivity)

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- Opportunities for staff in different roles to collaborate
  - Communication across support, instructional, and leadership staff: bidirectional, clear, and timely
5. On 3/6/2023 all-district email sent inclusive of trauma definition, information regarding the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research and link to 2014 TEDMED talk by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, a pediatrician who described her practice changes as a result of understanding the effects of childhood trauma [https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)

### ***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Updated *Intervention and School Crisis Response Plan* received, understood, and spread district-wide in conjunction with Act 71 Youth Suicide awareness and prevention education, inclusive of professional development plan and focused curriculum being delivered.
2. Crisis Response Procedures (2022/2023) “team” finalized under Scott Pentasuglio’s direction, incorporating key components of suicide prevention and response. Workgroup focusing on educational offerings to assist educators in meeting requirements of Act 71 (4 hrs. every 5 years for grades 6<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup>), while also expanding curriculum for students and resources for all in preventing suicide and reducing acts of violence.

### ***Key Objective***

- (d) coordinating with local partners/agencies

### ***Action Steps***

1. Received letter of support from Lackawanna/Susquehanna Counties Single County Authority (SCA) to pursue individual credentialing for four LPCs on staff at RSD
2. Working with SCA and J. Gorman for onsite Narcan administration training
3. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) finalized between RSD and Scranton Counseling Center (SCC) on 3/21/2023 as the mental health crisis provider in Lackawanna County

### ***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Additional D&A programming (building specific) based upon expressed needs: *Too Good for Drugs*, a universal K-12 prevention education program designed to mitigate the risk factors and enhance protective factors related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) use. The lessons introduce and develop skills for making healthy choices, building positive friendships, developing self-efficacy, communicating effectively, and resisting peer pressure and influence.

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*Too Good for Drugs* teaches five essential character development skills to build self-efficacy, promote healthy development, and academic success:

- Setting Reachable Goals
  - Making Responsible Decisions
  - Bonding with Pro-Social Others
  - Identifying and Managing Emotions
  - Communicating Effectively
2. Draft treatment-focused policy vs. suspension/fines to decrease stigma and promote entry into evidence based treatment interventions
  3. “Healthy Relationship” group in the High School running from 2/15 through 4/5/2023 with identified goals previously reported. At student request, this group will continue for another cycle with additional members added.
  4. Five week Coping Skills groups for Kdg, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students at West completing in March, to be followed by Social Skills groups for same grades by Ms. Valente, LPC

### ***Key Objective***

- (e) increasing access to data to inform decision-making: selecting a needs assessment(s) that will identify the gaps and provide additional focus for mental health services

### ***Action Steps***

1. Launch of evidence-based Pennsylvania School Climate Survey (SCS) initially planned for February occurred 3/3/2023 after learning that PDE establishes the survey distribution timeline. Additional community members identified and electronic and hard copy surveys distributed to same.
2. Enrolled as district, and part of NEIU 19 “region” to participate in the School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System (SHAPE) January 2023: a tool designed to collect regional data. Participated in meeting 2/23/2023 led by Dana Milakovic of PDE where she stressed the re-alignment of “learning environment teams” to reduce redundancy, and eliminate duplication.
3. Administrative consensus to accept SCS as best tool to identify resource gaps for RSD students and families.

### ***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Increased response rate/participation from parent/guardian and community during March 2023 School Climate Survey that will remain open through April 2023 or longer as needed. As of 3/31/2023 there were 21 community responses received (vs. 20 in 2019/2020); 148

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parent or guardian (<20); 87 staff (42); 329 elementary (310); 298 Jr/Sr (523)

2. Review of existing district-wide “prosocial programs supporting social and emotional health” as opportunities to enhance offerings through inclusion of mental health educational material
3. Launch of Aavidum (“I’ve got your back”) club spring 2023, designed to positively impact school culture and reduce youth suicide, based on the characteristics of healthy community: acceptance, appreciation, acknowledgement and caring. RSD is one of 7 districts registered for 4/25/2023 leadership forum that will focus on initial steps to launch this student-led club.