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# **Mental Health Matters: Improving access to care within Riverside School District**

**January - March 2024**

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April 15, 2024

Riverside School District  
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# Mental Health Matters

First quarter: January through March 31, 2024 Summary

The district counseling team continues to prioritize the program activities outlined in Grant ID 38311: School Mental Health & Safety & Security as awarded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) STOP School Violence Grant for FY2022 that began in October focuses on school safety strategies for Riverside School District (RSD) that include the oversight of district clinical personnel addressing mental health issues through strategies identified in the grant proposal, in addition to other initiatives designed to increase students' mental health literacy, and enhance connectedness among students, staff, and families.

The STOP Grant reporting requirements that began January 18, 2023, in conjunction with these quarterly **Mental Health Matters** reports highlight the action steps related to improving access to mental health services, promoting student mental health and well-being, and improving school climate such as:

- (a) integration of the counseling 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 best practices, 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. Joined Jude Villano of the Lackawanna/Susquehanna County Single County Authority (SCA) during his ***Bullying*** presentations on January 31<sup>st</sup> with each of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes for a total of 108 students that day. Results of pre and post- tests follow:

	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement
Group 1	65.23% to	91.25%	26.02%
Group 2	75.71% to	94.57%	18.86%
Group 3	66.95% to	92.04%	25.09%
Group 4	71.05% to	93.66%	22.61%
Group 5	68.94% to	97.70%	28.76%
Group 6	65.57% to	94.63%	29.06%

Overall improvement score for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was 25.06%. According to Mr. Villano “the other component that can’t be measured was the honest conversations throughout the presentations”.

2. Joined Sheriff Mark McAndrew on February 16<sup>th</sup> as he presented to 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at East about **bullying** behavior, including resiliency factors such as school attendance, rule adherence, and connectedness to peers, family, and community.
3. At the invitation of Dan Digwood, C. Wydeen met with the 17 Spring Coaches during their 4:00 PM meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> related to mental health awareness (signs, symptoms, and intervention strategies) following the initiative launched August 2023.
4. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, Shannon Wells, National Certified Counselor (NCC), Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) began at East elementary.
5. At the invitation of Coach Sean Hughes, C. Wydeen joined his player and family meeting at 6:30 PM on March 5<sup>th</sup> to talk about mental health awareness topics identified above, and to promote the upcoming three Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) classes being offered for grades 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> from 8:30 am to 12:30 on March 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>; April 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, and May 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Detailed information and parental permission slips have been shared with students, staff, and coaches, and sign-up sheets for each class (limited to 25 students) are posted outside of the Guidance Department.
6. C. Wydeen and K. Wallace of Northeast Suicide Prevention Initiative (NSPI) presented to Ms. O’Shea’s 80 high school students on March 18<sup>th</sup> on topics they identified related to mental health (anxiety, depression, stress, addiction, suicide, etc.). This request was made in response to district-wide offering related to counseling department’s availability to deliver classroom based instruction designed to identify at risk students and trauma-informed responses.
7. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, joined Trooper Robert Urban of the PA State Police, Dunmore, as arranged for his presentation on **bullying** to all East students and staff who were able to attend. (Because of space conflict, his presentation for the high school is now scheduled for April 18<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 AM for three grades, and 9:00 AM for three grades, as requested by administration).

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

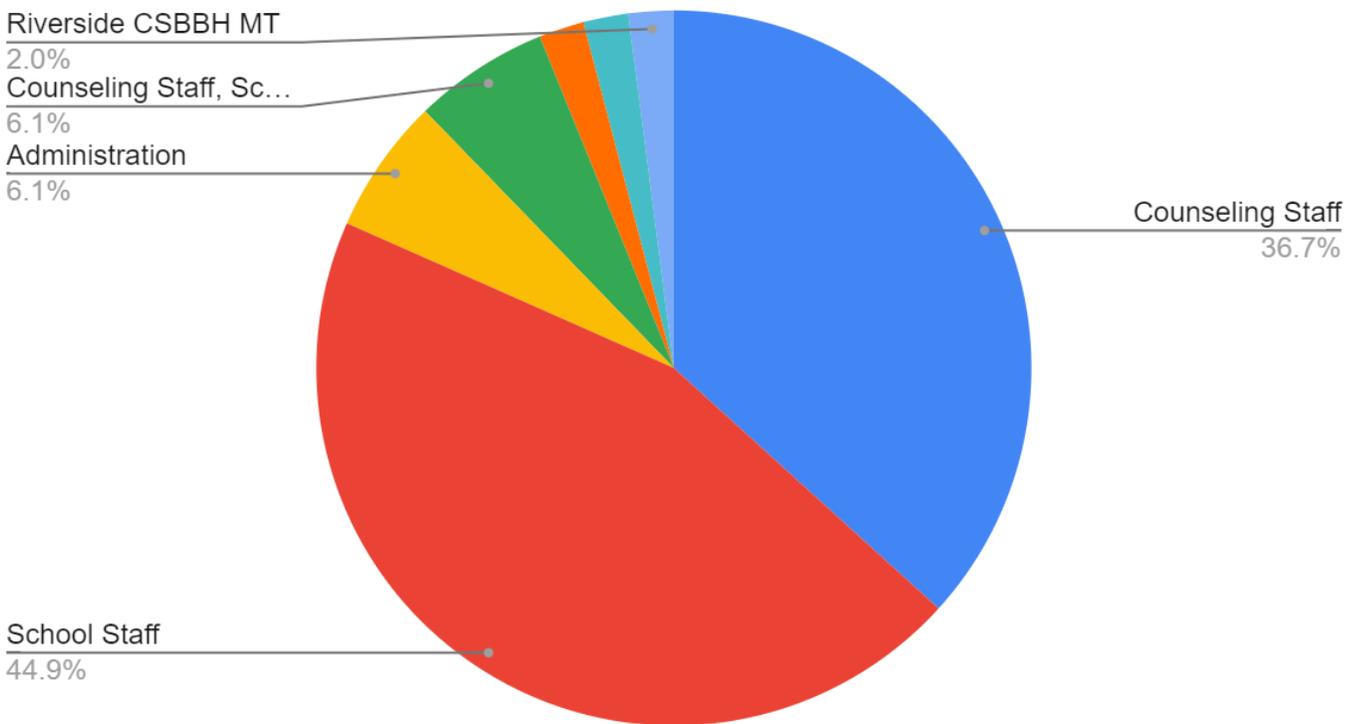
1. Dedicated time with staff, in combination with on line training modules, to achieve compliance with STOP grant objectives by the end of the Project (2025). Objective one states: (a) *at least 90% of school staff members, (b) at least 15 local police officers, (c) and 75% of District students in grades 6-12 will increase understanding and knowledge through training to identify students who are at-risk of mental health problems and of the trauma-informed approach to mitigate and respond to potential school violence incidences.*
  - (a) 185 (of 189) school staff members, inclusive of teachers, aides, staff and administration completed the mandatory, eight (8) courses offered by Vector training during February. These courses were selected by counseling department leadership because of their content to meet the stated objective above. Courses were (1) Recognition & Response to Bullying, (2) Cyberbullying, (3) Secondary trauma awareness, (4) Self-Harm awareness and prevention, (5) Student Mental Health awareness, intervention & referral, (6) Trauma awareness, (7) Trauma- informed practices, (8) Youth suicide: awareness, prevention & postvention. Result: 99.5% compliance with staff training objective.
  - (b) 7 Moosic Borough police officers completed the Mental Health First Aid course on February 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> as coordinated with NAMI approved trainers; Taylor Borough has 11 registered officers scheduled to complete the 8 hour training on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> (Saturdays), as requested by Chief Holland. Result: 18 local police officers targeted for certification in evidence based MHFA training.
  - (c) Seven (7) high school students completed first Youth MHFA training March 20<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>; 12 have signed up for April 24<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> as of this date, with final course this school year on May 15<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> .
2. Target identified within the STOP grant for the 3-year Project period (10/1/2022 through 10/1/2025) also includes the reduction by 10% of the number of referrals to outside agencies. Out Patient (OP) services provided by LIU18 were 130 during the 2021/2022 school year. Through December 30, 2023 there were 96 referrals to OP, and for this quarter (Jan- March), 14 students were referred for OP services (total of 110 this school year).

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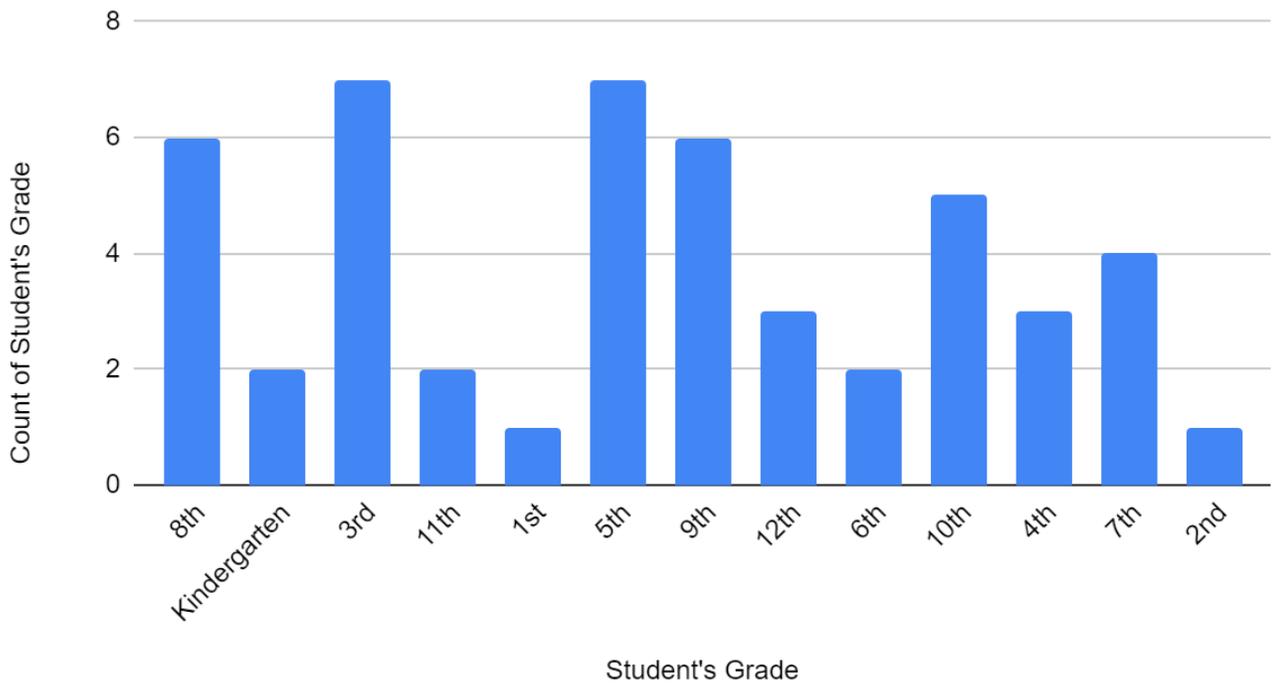
Summary of referral data for 49 students January through March 2024 follows, with the majoring of referrals from school staff. The bar graph that follows notes that the majority of referrals are for students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 9<sup>th</sup>.

Referral sources are also asked to identify on the brief referral form that they complete, the “type of support” they believe the student can benefit from. This referral information is reviewed daily by the counseling department leadership, then discussed with the student and parent/caregiver as appropriate prior to the assignment of the voluntary mental health service being initiated.

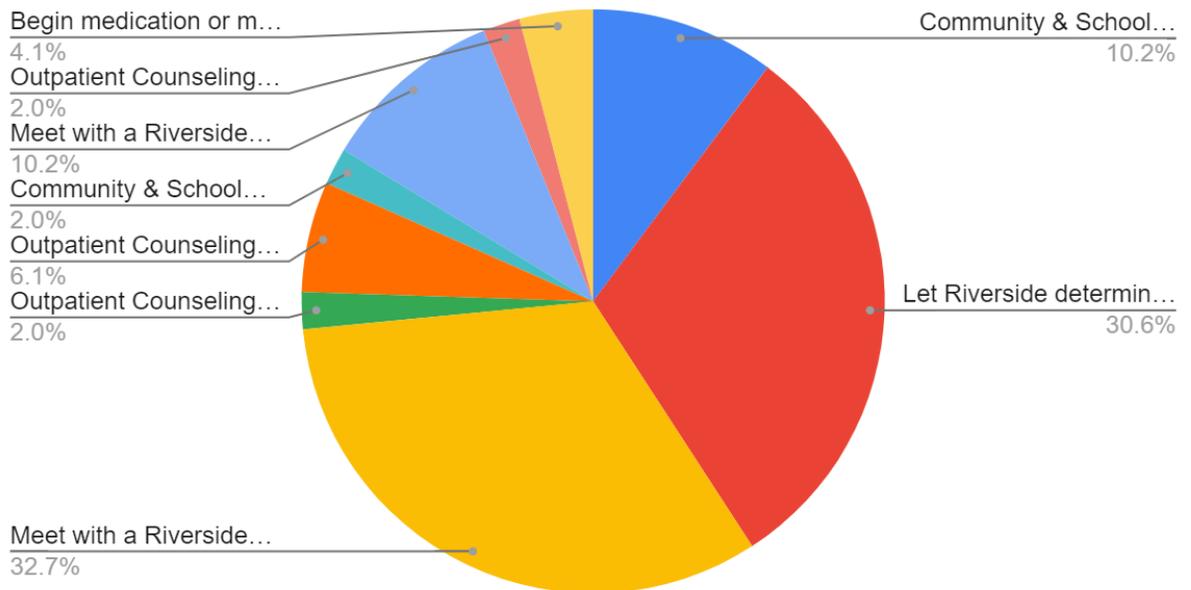
### Count of The person completing this referral is:



## Count of Student's Grade



## Count of What type of support are you interested in? Check all that apply. If you are unsure of which option, please see the...



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(b) Continued investigation of sustainable funding

***Action Steps***

1. Administrative personnel have responded to February 29<sup>th</sup> deadline for Meritorious Grant available through PCCD, in addition to other opportunities as available.
2. Initiate credentialing applications to insurance sources when/if grant-funded LPC program is terminated.
3. Continue to advocate with school and community leaders for sustainable funding source to solidify LPC clinical role within the school setting.

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***Key Objective***

- (c) supporting policy revisions/development and implementation to assure compliance with best practices, current legislative and educational requirements.

***Action Steps***

1. Reviewed PSBA suicide policies with Scott Pentasuglio and updated RSD's current Suicide Crisis Response Policy after consultation with Mr. Yarem and K. Wallace (NSPI); submitted to Scott on March 1, 2024.

***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Suicide/Crisis Response Procedures disseminated and understood by all staff after finalization by administration.
2. Continuation of the Aavidum Club ("I've got your back") with student-directed activities and staff support, identifying plans to spread the message of connection and support throughout the district.
3. Continued distribution of the monthly "Counselor Corner", highlighting topics of interest and health promotion.

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**Key Objective**

(d) coordinating with local partners/agencies

**Action Steps**

1. Continued participation in monthly System of Care meetings within Lackawanna County led by Behavioral Health Coordinator from the Lackawanna/Susquehanna Office of Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities/Early Intervention.
2. Continued participation in the Lackawanna County Suicide Prevention Alliance.
3. Continued participation with Northeast Suicide Prevention Initiative (NSPI).
4. Monthly discussion with Lackawanna County Behavioral Health (Mental Health and Substance Use) and Office of Children & Youth Services (OCYF) leadership with goal of facilitating communication and access to services for our youth and their families in a timely manner.

**Benchmarks of Success**

1. Meaningful communication with agency partners and improved access to needed resources for our youth and families.

**Key Objective**

(e) increasing access to data to inform decision-making

**Action Steps**

1. On line Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) 2023 completed October 23<sup>rd</sup> for grades 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> with C. Wydeen identified as test coordinator.
2. Preliminary data reflects 314 responses (response rate of 79%) from four grades within RSD (with final data due from PAYS the end of April).
3. Compilation of data from School Climate Survey and PAYS in draft form for delivery to administration April 22, 2024.

**Benchmarks of Success**

1. Using data from above sources, in addition to diverse stakeholder input, to draft strategic plan related to mental health initiative moving forward.