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

**October – December 2023**

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January 15, 2024

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# Mental Health Matters

Fourth quarter: October through December 31, 2023 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 includes the onboarding of school support personnel to address mental health issues through strategies identified in the grant proposal.

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, and strategies to improve 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. Three LPCs, Department Chair, and Mental Health Supervisor completed the evidence-based 8- hour Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and all staff aware of our availability to deliver classroom based instruction designed to identify at risk students and trauma-informed responses.
2. Two LPCs have achieved train-the-trainer status to deliver the Youth MHFA

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curriculum to maximum of 25 youth per training. Engagement of 15 Moosic and Taylor police officers, staff, and students underway to schedule these trainings beginning January 2024.

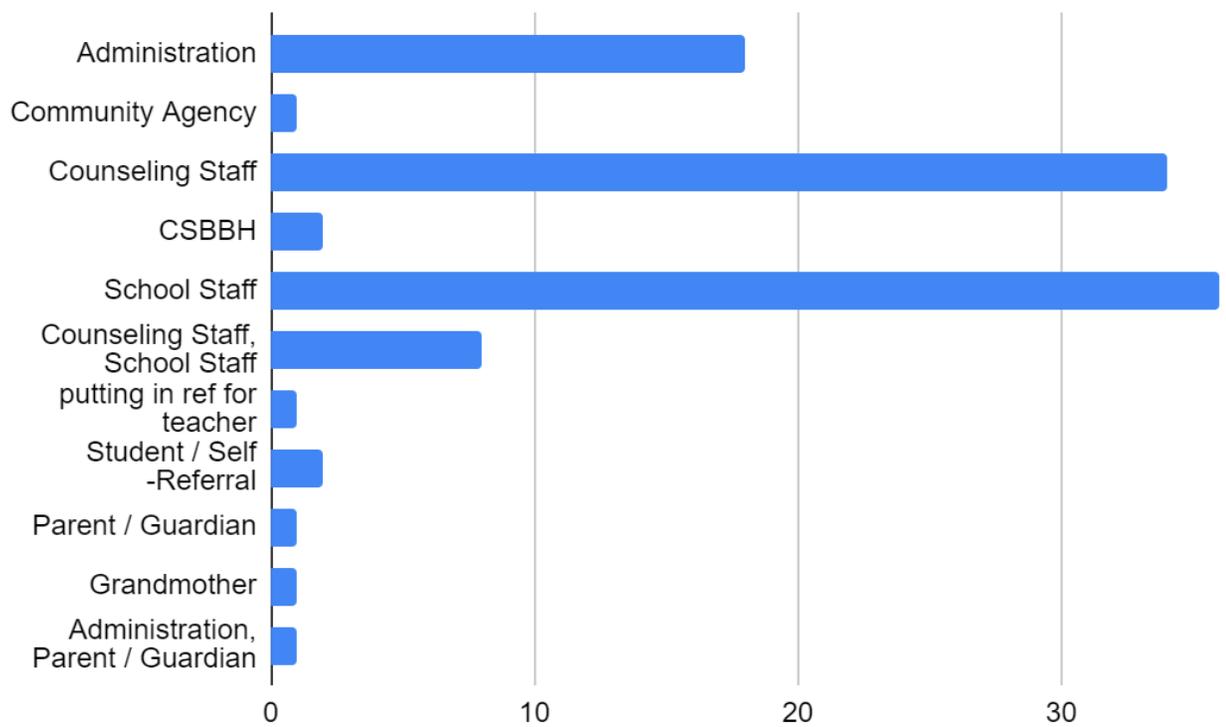
3. As routine referrals for mental health services are received they are assigned the most appropriate resource within the continuum (e.g. LPC, outpatient, CSBBH, etc.), and updates made within FOCUS. Urgent or emergency referrals are seen immediately. Reminder to all potential referral sources including link to “request for mental health services” via Counseling Department webpage.
4. Presented 60 minute Mental Health Awareness & Support Training on 10/16/2023 to 3 baseball coaches, as requested by head coach; and on 11/8/2023 with Fall-team coaches/athletic trainer/AD; and one additional coach on 11/20<sup>th</sup> as requested.
5. Attended “A Summit to Change Young Lives” conference 10/13/2023 focused on enhancing community networks and reimagining mental health as a social justice strategy: a paradigm shift that reimagines mental health as a support for healthy development, not a response to pathology. Schools and primary care were highlighted as healing and anti-racist centers of support for our youth.
6. Hosted \$2,000 NSPI’s sponsorship of Aavidum Club at Jr/Sr High School on December 6, 2023.
7. Investigation of on-line training opportunities via Vector Solutions, as mandated by Act 55 of 2022 for all public school employees. Topics such as trauma-informed approaches, suicide and bullying awareness, and behavioral health awareness may prove most applicable in this format, reaching all staff via on line modules that verify completion, passing scores, and result in certification proof in the event of an audit.
8. As of January 5, 2024, the LPC primarily serving East Elementary, J. Herber, has resigned from that position, with coverage by C. Wydeen, LCSW, PhD, and the Counseling Department team until a replacement is approved.

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

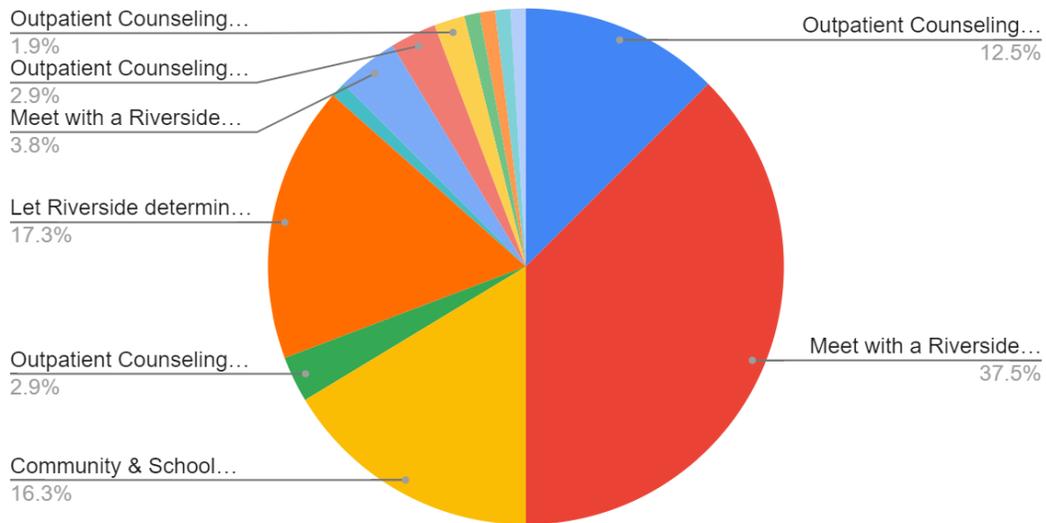
1. Dedicated time with staff, in combination with on line training modules, to achieve compliance with STOP grant objectives by the end of the Project (2025). Objective one states: *at least 90% of school staff members, at least 15 local police officers, and 75% of District students in grades 6-12 will 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.*

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 2021/2022 school year; as of December 30, 2023, 96 students were active in OP services.
3. On September 28, 2023, our four LPCs were informed that NBHCC/Community Care has denied our third appeal to have them become enrolled with PA Medical Assistance to provide billable Counseling Services within the NE provider network.
4. Summary of referral data for 106 unique students October through December 2023 follows, with majority of referrals (98) from school staff :

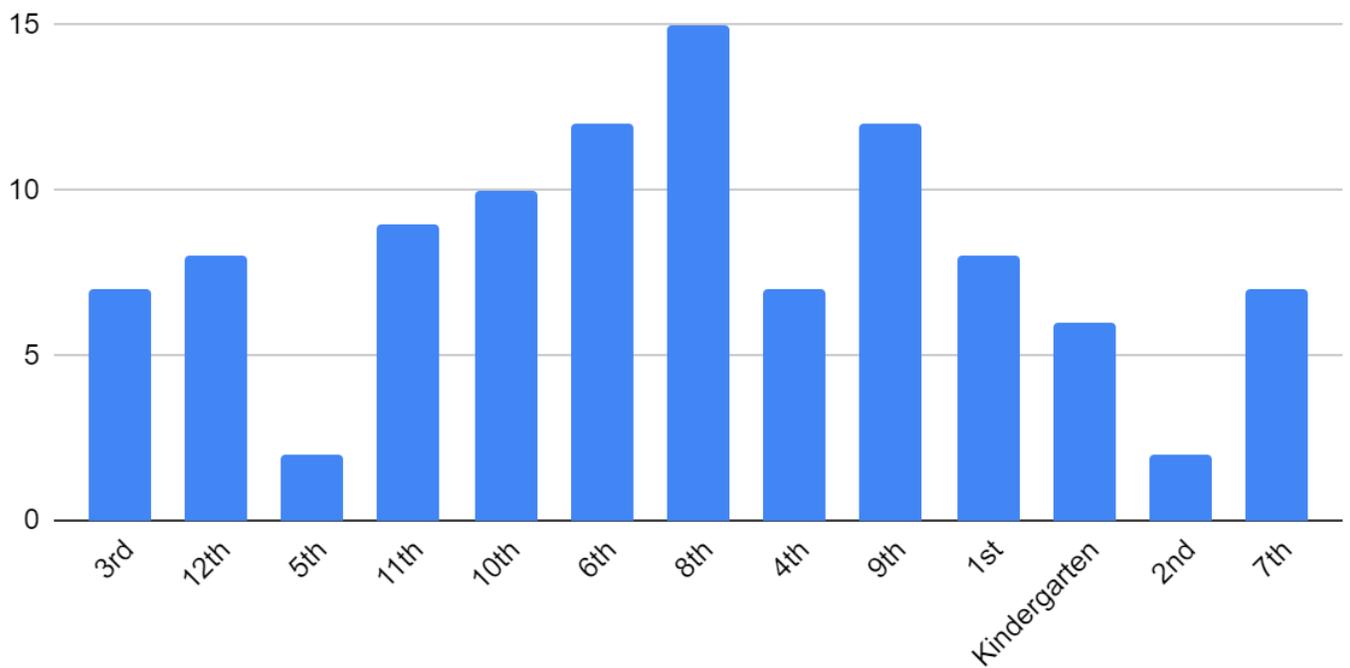
### Count of The person completing this referral is:



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

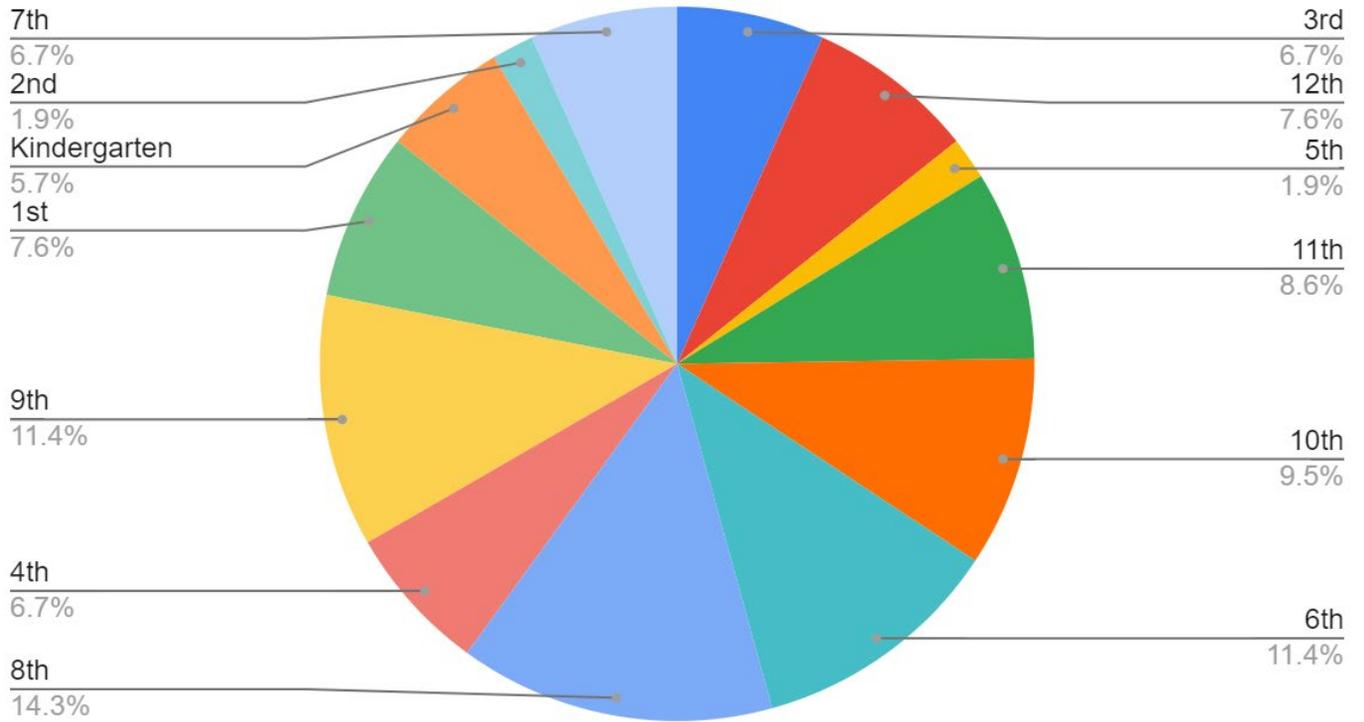


### Count of Student's Grade



Count of Student's Grade

## Count of Student's Grade



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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. Completed 2-day training at NEIU 19 on September 27 and 28<sup>th</sup> as designated RSD flight team member trained in the National Association of School Psychologists PREPaRE school safety and crisis preparedness curriculum. Shared curriculum, including Tier 1, 2 &3 level interventions with leadership, along with reproducible resources.
2. Investigating district-wide educational efforts related to trauma informed/sensitive approaches, for most effective and efficient delivery.
3. Invited by Dean of Students/Attendance Officer to attend scheduled meetings at elementary and high school level beginning October 2023.

***Benchmarks of Success***

1. Crisis Response Procedures (2022/2023) disseminated and understood as finalized under Scott Pentasuglio's direction.
2. Electronic tool (Google doc) created to capture crisis assessments completed through partnership with Scranton Counseling Center, becoming operational in September.
3. Continuation of the Aavidum Club ("I've got your back") fall 2023 with students and staff active in NEIU-sponsored activities in October, identifying plans to spread the message of connection and support throughout the district.
4. At the invitation of Mr. Lacomis, joined the Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) meetings that he facilitates starting this academic year, with the goal of identifying underlying individual/familial issues contributing to truancy and offering additional resources to assist with same.

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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. In November, and continuing monthly, focused agenda 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.
5. Added Moosic police department to the OCYF referral chain in an effort to expedite investigations into suspected abuse cases.

**Benchmarks of Success**

1. Cheerleaders and trumpet students participated in the NSPI suicide prevention walk at McDade Park on September 23.

**Key Objective**

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

**Action Steps**

1. On line Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) 2023 launched week of October 23 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.

**Benchmarks of Success**

1. As of 10/30/2023, 450 youth in grades 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> completed the on-line PAYS, with response rate of 79%. Preliminary data is being reviewed for discussion with leadership, particularly related to responses regarding the topics of bullying, emotional abuse, insults and name-calling.