
Mental Health Matters: Every Student Matters

Improving access to care within Riverside School District

July - September 2024

October 15, 2024

Mental Health Matters: Every Student Matters

Third quarter: July through September 30, 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) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) STOP School Violence Grant for FY2022 focusing on school safety strategies for Riverside School District (RSD).

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 health and well-being, and improving school climate such as:

Key Objectives

- (a) continued integration within the school culture and expansion of the role for each Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and supervisory staff 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. On 8/1/2024 Dr. Wydeen presented the importance of balance to the fall coaching staff, with goal of increasing understanding of student and staff mental health needs based upon district and national data, reminding coaches about school and community resources, and how to access same.
2. During September, Samantha (Valente) Carlin, NCC, LPC at West Elementary is soliciting referrals for 6-week Social Skills group, as successfully initiated last year. As students are suggested by staff, families are then contacted for permission. Ms. Valente is also an active participant in the SUCCESS team meetings at West during this student assistance program intervention.
3. Shannon Wells, NCC, LPC at East Elementary confirming group offering to begin this fall based upon last year's success and identified needs from our data sources related to Social Emotional Learning (SEL: getting along with others, conflict resolution skills, friendship issues, etc.). Ms. Wells is also

identifying topics and confirming her availability with classroom teachers to assist with the SEL related to emotional regulation.

4. Related to sustainable funding for LPCs beyond grant expiration date of October 2025, written information shared with Mr. Brennan on 9/18/2024 to assist with newest grant he prepared for 9/26/2024 submission. Reiterated preference for stable funding via budget approval for the three (3) positions based upon national and district data validating the need for accessible mental health services within the natural school environment. Also presented the opportunity for the two (2) LPCs to achieve the school counseling certification that would allow them increased flexibility in meeting the dual clinical (LPC) and school counselor needs within the Counseling Department. Since PCCD's School Safety & Security Committee (SSSC) requires a "school counselor for every 250 students" for RSD to achieve Level 3 status within their **Revised Behavioral Health Baseline Criteria (2023)**, the school counselor certification would provide flexibility in the counseling role and allow the Counseling Department to expand its response to changing needs. In conversations with other Mental Health Supervisors in the area, it is also worth noting that being grant-dependent for these important services impacts recruitment and can have negative effects upon the school climate as students, families, and staff become increasingly reliant on our immediate response to their identified need for service.
5. Presented at 9/3/2024 high school staff orientation summary information related to mental health services available within RSD, October 2023 PAYS data, September as National Suicide Prevention month, and request in promoting Aavidum interest throughout the school year (over 50 students in grades 7th through 12th have signed up!).
6. Facilitated discussion with Vector Solutions on 9/18/2024 as current on-line training contract expires 2/10/2025. During this meeting follow up email to leadership included additional options for consideration, in addition to multi-year amendment to existing contract for 24 months that has been received.

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) Result: 99.5% compliance with staff training objective during February 2024. Next training targeted for February 10, 2025.
 - (b) Result: 18 local police officers certified in evidence based Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training.
 - (c) Result: 21 students trained in the spring of 2024 in Youth MHFA, with plans to repeat spring of 2025.
 - (d) During the high school staff orientation on 9/3/2024, reviewed the importance of accessible mental health services within the school environment, facts related to suicide during this National Suicide Prevention month, and provided updated information regarding Aavidum. Brief description of Aavidum was sent to teachers, asking them to post on their google classrooms and promote interest in this student-led activity. As of 9/30/2024 over 50 students grades 7-12th have signed up!

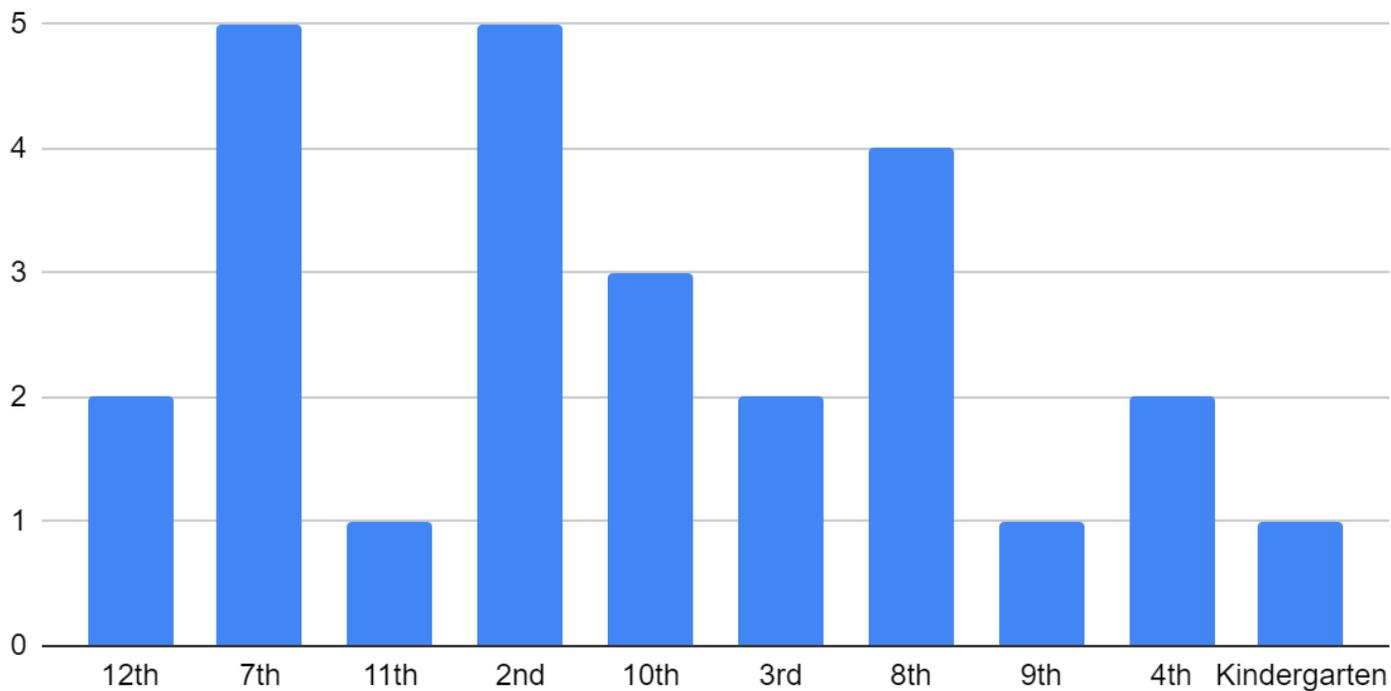
2. Target identified within the STOP grant for the 3-year Project period (10/1/2022 through 10/1/2025) also includes the reduction by 10% of the number of referrals to outside agencies. During this quarter (July- Sept), fourteen (14) students were referred for OP services as of 9/30/2024. It is worth noting that while the initial proposal identified a goal of reducing OP services, the increasing number of students in need of this level of care is a reality. The school shooting in Georgia on September 4th reiterated the “invisible injuries that can create life-changing symptoms that sometimes paralyze them”, in talking about the trauma that has become more common in schools (<https://apple.news/AktqtCxb8TDaNHlrWkgZa8w>). Additionally, one LPC is on leave through February 2025, requiring increased flexibility in meeting the needs of our district.

Of the 26 students referred during July through September 2024: 25 were referred by “school staff”, a consolidated category created in September, to replace prior referral categories of “administration and counseling staff”.

During this reporting quarter, one referral was from “parent/guardian”. There were no new referrals received during July and August.

The following table identifies the distribution of the referrals by grade level, noting the highest number came from 7th (population of 126); 2nd (139) and 8th (102).

Count of Student's Grade

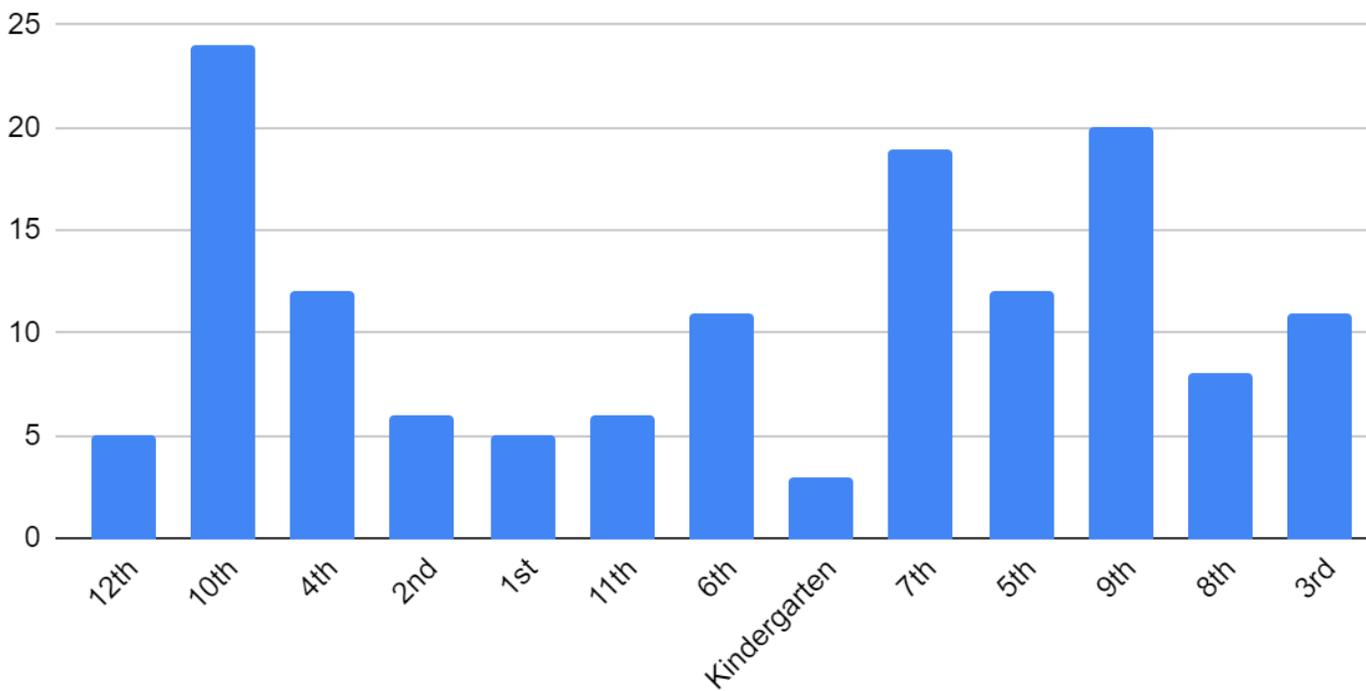


Count of Student's Grade

As a point of comparison, during the period December 2022 to December 2023, the following table depicts the grade distribution during this 12-month Year One period, followed by a pie graph highlighting the range of “presenting concerns” leading to the mental health referral during this same time period.

Please note that a more detailed analysis of Year One (December 2022 through December 2023) and Year Two (January 2023 through December 2024) highlighting the variables of grade, school enrollment data, and presenting concerns is being developed with the addition of qualitative data to enrich our understanding.

Count of Student's Grade

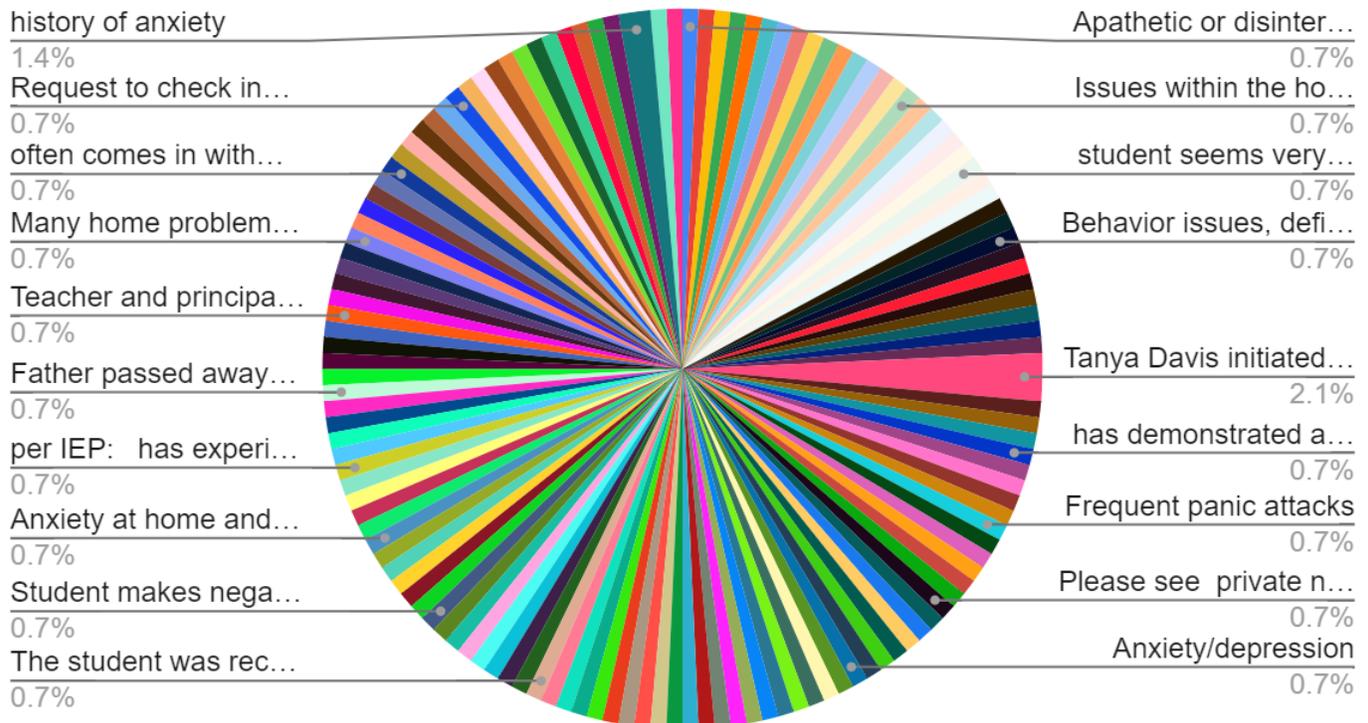


Count of Student's Grade

When viewed in color, the pie graph below for Year One depicts the varied reasons for referrals to the Counseling Department, with current qualitative reviews of these reasons being categorized for a richer understanding of the data moving forward.

Another data source that will begin October 1, 2024 and will enrich our data related to sustainability is the documentation of LPC interventions for students not “officially” identified for counseling services, but due to escalating/unregulated emotions and requests by school personnel, benefit from the immediate availability of our staff. This tracking comes at the suggestion of our team members, as made during our weekly team meetings as we review the strengths and challenges of the initiative, identifying opportunities to support RSD students and staff.

Count of Please briefly describe the presenting concerns.



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.
2. Draft Canine/therapy dog (visitation) Policy submitted to administration on 9/25/2024.

Benchmarks of Success

1. Suicide/Crisis Response Procedures disseminated and understood by all staff after finalization by administration.
2. Designation of the Aavidum group to club status within the district, acknowledging another step in our stigma-reducing activities by spreading the message of "I've got your back" via student-directed activities and staff support.
3. Continued distribution of the monthly "Counselor Corner", highlighting topics of interest and health promotion during the academic year.

Key Objective

(d) coordinating with local partners/agencies

Action Steps

1. Attended 7/3/2024 Center for Health and Human Services Research and Action (CHHSRA) Strategic Planning Committee meeting to identify three (3) priorities for Lackawanna County based upon survey responses.
2. Joined Kathy Wallace of Northeast Suicide Prevention Initiative (NSPI) 8/6 & 8/7/2024 in Harrisburg at Suicide Prevention Alliance conference.
3. Attendance at 8/13/2024 Suicide Prevention Alliance group of Lackawanna County.
4. On 9/4/2024 joined Panorama webinar related to the root causes of chronic absenteeism; joined PAYS web-tool presentation.
5. On 9/7/2024 participated in Wayne/Pike Counties NSPI walk at Wallenpaupack Area High School.
6. Continued participation in monthly System of Care meetings led by the Behavioral Health Coordinator from the Lackawanna/Susquehanna Office of Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities/Early Intervention.

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7. Continued participation with NSPI in support of suicide prevention.
 8. 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.
 9. Attended 9/10/2024 webinar by American Foundation for Suicide Prevention describing suicide as “complex health issue”; describing the suicidal pathway/tunnel vision that brain science has identified.
 10. Attended Resilience Colloquium 9/20/2024: Resilience as Public Health at Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine. Michael Unger, PhD (social worker) stressed the need for system integration/co-ordination (education/mental health) and our responsibility to create conditions that make it possible (for students and families) to thrive under adverse conditions. He stressed the need for help to “navigate to resources and negotiate what’s needed”; finding the right “fit” for the individual.

Benchmarks of Success

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

Key Objective

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

Action Steps

1. Continued review of Year 1 and Year 2 data (ending December 2024) and discussions with key stakeholders to identify variables of interest for quantitative and qualitative analysis of this initiative.

Benchmarks of Success

1. Using data from survey sources, in addition to diverse stakeholder input described above, review of priorities within the mental health initiative targeted for first quarter 2025.

