

State of California

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION

MHSSA Collaboration Teleconference Meeting Summary
June 7, 2023

MHSOAC
1812 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95811

Staff Presenting:

Tom Orrock, Deputy Director of Operations
Cheryl Ward, Health Program Specialist
Michele Nottingham, Health Program Specialist
Melissa Martin-Mollard, Ph.D., Chief, Research and Evaluation

Welcome and Introductions

Tom Orrock, Deputy Director of Operations, called the Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) Collaboration teleconference meeting of the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC or Commission) to order at approximately 1:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the second quarterly meeting.

Deputy Director Orrock showed a video titled “San Diego MHSSA Wellness Room” and noted that the link to the video is posted on the Commission’s MHSSA web page.

Cheryl Ward, Health Program Specialist, provided an overview of the purpose and structure of the meeting. She discussed the Annual Fiscal Reports (AFRs), which are due 30 days after the end of the grant year along with a modified budget showing any unspent funds that are planned to be spent during the remainder of the grant.

Ms. Ward stated many grantees have asked about proposed changes to their budgets. The protocol is to explain proposed changes from what was proposed in the initial budget or modified budget to the grant monitor. Once reviewed, the change can either be accepted and noted in the grantee file or be accepted and require a modified budget. Only the most major changes would require a contract amendment.

Michele Nottingham, Health Program Specialist, stated MHSSA program site visits help staff learn about challenges and successes, inform future work, and provide perspective, inspiration, and the opportunity for staff and (when possible) Commissioners to see the great work being done. Five site visits have been conducted over the past eight months and more will soon be scheduled. She asked counties interested in hosting a site visit to contact staff offline.

Deputy Director Orrock provided an update on the technical assistance Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and next steps.

Suicide Prevention and Intervention

Deputy Director Orrock stated the theme for this meeting is suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. The goal is to ensure that the MHSSA grantees are equipped with the best approaches on the subject and to provide an opportunity for shared learning and discussion on what has become a crisis in California and around the nation.

Ms. Nottingham introduced Mara Madrigal-Weiss and Heather Nemour from San Diego County and asked them to give their presentation.

San Diego County

Heather Nemour, Coordinator, Student Support Services and Programs Division, San Diego County Office of Education (COE), stated San Diego's MHSSA grant is unique in that it focuses on capacity-building of Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) that are part of the grant. She provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the goals and objectives and needs assessment results of the Creating Opportunities Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES) Grant Project.

Mara Madrigal-Weiss, Executive Director, Student Wellness and School Culture, San Diego COE, continued the slide presentation and discussed suicide risk screenings, capacity-building efforts, and Calming Corners for students and school staff. She noted that much is unknown about suicidal ideation, including the number of suicide risk screenings completed throughout the county and state. It is critical to collect this data.

Ms. Nemour continued the slide presentation and discussed additional data collection and next steps. She stated the program has begun to move into deeper trainings, exploring communication pathways between the medical and education systems when a student is identified in a mental health crisis or experiencing suicide ideation, and peer programming.

Discussion

Deputy Director Orrock read a comment in the Chat Section from Stacey Adler, Mono County, asking if Calming Corners is in each classroom or in each school site.

Ms. Nemour stated one Calming Corners kit was distributed to each of the 470 COPES schools to be in a common area so it will be open to all students.

Jill Barnes, Napa County, asked if LEAs worked with community-based organizations as they developed this work.

Ms. Nemour stated many COPES schools have community-based organizations providing services on site.

Suicide Prevention Specialist

Deputy Director Orrock introduced Stan Collins and asked him to give his presentation.

Stan Collins, Suicide Prevention Specialist, Directing Change, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the big-picture focus and key elements of suicide prevention, risk and protective factors, effective messaging, and what can be done better. He stated suicide prevention is multi-pronged. It is not about convincing people not to die, it is about helping people find reasons for living. It comes down to hope and

pain – suicide happens when the pain outweighs the hope, but hope is greater than pain. A core element of the MHSSA grants is reminding a custodian, teacher, or food service worker that research shows that connectedness and belonging are key protective factors to suicide prevention. He noted that effective messaging, including normalizing the messaging around encouraging help-seeking rather than normalizing suicide prevention, is a key element that often gets lost in suicide prevention.

Discussion

Carla Truttman, Siskiyou County, asked about strategies in getting information out to families and community members serving students.

Mr. Collins suggested providing information frequently with consistency, although inviting parents to a suicide prevention forum attaches stigma and fears. Instead, the San Diego COPES Project invites parents to a workshop called “What I Wish My Parents Knew,” which includes other issues such as general academic issues and communication. It is a once-per-semester event.

Ms. Truttman asked about teacher trainings in rural counties where schools are isolated with no substitute teachers to allow time for teachers to attend trainings.

Deputy Director Orrock stated this issue may be addressed in the next presentation.

Humboldt County

Ms. Ward introduced Gabriel Bennett from Humboldt County and asked him to give his presentation.

Gabriel Bennett, Senior Program Manager, Humboldt County Children’s Behavioral Health, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the structure, referral process, prevention, intervention, postvention, and trainings for the Bridges to Success Grant Project. He stated, before this grant, the county had a long history of schools and behavioral health not collaborating. Breaking down those barriers has helped many students. The county worked with staff, especially school administration, on suicide signs and other mental health needs. They also worked to meet students and their families in the least restrictive environment. They work in teams and utilize the continuous care model with safety plans to stabilize students and look for long-term care, if needed.

Roman Ortega, Navigator, Humboldt County, introduced the next speaker, who was a parent providing a testimonial.

This speaker was a parent, who shared the experiences of his son, as a Native American youth in a poor, rural area. His son knew the child who committed suicide in the McKinleyville High School, which was devastating to the community. He developed mental health challenges and epilepsy during COVID. While his parents were caring and involved, he struggled with isolation and lack of activities in online schooling. The intervention of the MHSSA Grant project helped him to heal from depression and avoid further crisis. The speaker stated there is a nationwide mental health crisis due to COVID. There is not enough help, especially for children in unserved and underserved communities. Mental health services are desperately needed in rural areas, where stigma, gun violence, and poverty compound with intergenerational trauma and the state of the world that children must grow up in. However, rural mental health is

underfunded, understaffed, and inaccessible. Programs like the Humboldt Bridges to Success Grant project are literally the difference between life and death for rural youth.

Mr. Collins stated appreciation for the speaker's comment that something may have been diverted with his son. He asked for greater detail on what may have caused the diversion.

The speaker stated the interaction with the Navigator was integral. Mr. Ortega treated the speaker's son like a needed friend rather than on a clinical platform meeting in an office space. He took the time to learn what his son enjoyed, engaged in outside activities, and encouraged him to think about potential opportunities rather than feeling like he was in a closed box. Helping him to feel like he was a human being by someone outside of the family averted a crisis. Having a male friend who was an adult with a different viewpoint and was there for him made a tremendous amount of difference for him.

Research and Evaluation Update

Melissa Martin-Mollard, Ph.D., Chief, Research and Evaluation, provided an overview of the MHSSA evaluation plan. The evaluation will be in three phases that will take place over the next five years: evaluation planning, implementation, and findings and dissemination. She introduced the WestEd team, the MHSSA evaluation partners, to provide a high-level overview of evaluation next steps.

Natalie Romer, Ph.D., Senior Associate, WestEd, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the WestEd vision and key staff, Phase 1. She stated, given the importance of community engagement within the evaluation process, the work will begin with a community engagement plan to identify ways to leverage community engagement through the evaluation including the planning process.

Nicole Tirado-Strayer, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate, WestEd, continued the slide presentation and discussed WestEd's approach. She asked grantees to input one word into a word cloud that describes the impact that they hope their MHSSA initiatives will have.

Discussion

Heather Thomsen, Santa Clara County, asked if grantees will form a cohort to discuss what to measure and quantify.

Dr. Romer stated listening sessions will begin this summer for feedback, technical assistance, and collective learning.

Janel Alberts asked about the timing expectation in terms of providing data and information to the team for grants on target to complete by 2024.

Ms. Martin-Mollard stated this will need to be taken under consideration when drafting the evaluation plan.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.