

Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) Brief MHSSA Workgroup Meeting, October 5, 2022

The Role of the Research and Evaluation Committee MHSSA Workgroup

The role of the Research and Evaluation Committee MHSSA Workgroup will be to provide expert guidance to Commission staff regarding MHSSA evaluation planning and implementation. Commission staff will work closely with the workgroup members on several key activities, including, but not limited to:

- Supporting the development of evaluation components, such as a theory of change model and evaluation questions.
- Providing guidance on implementation of the community engagement plan including the methods and processes for engagement.
- Reviewing and providing feedback on information provided by Commission staff and contractors conducting the evaluation (e.g., evaluation plans and methodology, etc.).
- Providing guidance and insight into the development of reports and review draft reports produced from analysis or synthesis of MHSSA quantitative or qualitative data.
- Along with Commission staff, reporting out at Committee meetings on MHSSA Workgroup activities. When appropriate, leading peer/public discussion of MHSSA evaluation during Committee meetings.

The Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA)

Senate Bill 75, 2019, established the MHSSA, and provided \$40 million in one-time and \$10 million in ongoing funding to establish partnerships between county behavioral health departments and local education agencies focused on student mental health needs.

The MHSSA is intended to foster stronger school–community mental health partnerships that can leverage resources to help students succeed by authorizing counties and local education agencies to enter into partnerships that provide prevention and intervention services for students to support their social-emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. School–community mental health partnerships offer an opportunity to reach children and youth in an environment where they are comfortable and that is accessible statewide.

The Budget Act of 2021 provided an additional \$95 million to fund applicants who applied to the first round of MHSSA but did not receive a grant. In addition, the Federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA) provided up to \$100 million through the State Fiscal



Recovery Fund (SFRF) to support the remaining California counties in establishing an MHSSA program. In total, MHSSA is a \$255 million dollar investment.

The Commission's Progress in Implementing the MHSSA

The Commission has disbursed MHSSA funds in phases to support school mental health partnerships in 57 of California's 58 counties:

- Phase 1 grants were awarded to 18 applicants in 2020.
- Phase 2 grants were awarded to 19 applicants in 2021.
- Phase 3 grants were awarded to 20 applicants in 2022.

In addition, remaining MHSSA funds were distributed to 41 partners in 2022 to supplement their existing MHSSA grants.

Depending on the grant phase, most grants are 4 to 6 years in length, and are scheduled to end by December 31, 2026.

To address local school and community needs, MHSSA grant partners are implementing a variety of strategies and services, including:

- Providing **training** to teachers, staff, students, and parents on mental health literacy and related topics to increase awareness and access to services.
- Implementing schoolwide **prevention curriculum** to support student wellness (e.g., Social and Emotional Learning).
- Conducting **outreach** to support the health and wellbeing of students and families.
- Implementing universal and targeted **screening** for students for early detection and intervention.
- Establishing **Wellness Centers** on school campuses.
- Providing students with mental health **services and supports** on school campuses.
- Providing **referrals** to community agencies and assisting students and families with accessing those services.
- Striving to build the **infrastructure and workforce capacity** for sustainability.

In addition to the variation in MHSSA activities and services, MHSSA grant partners are leveraging different sources of funding (e.g., Mental Health Services Act Prevention and Early Intervention funds, and the Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program funds) alongside MHSSA to deliver mental health services and supports to students and families.

MHSSA Legislative Requirements for Reporting and Monitoring

The MHSSA legislation lays out key elements and products for data reporting and monitoring of the MHSSA including a Status Report and a Final Report to establish performance metrics to track and report regularly on outcomes consistent with the requirements of WIC 5886(j) and WIC 5886(c)(3), including:

- Successful strategies and lessons learned.
- The number of students served and their demographic characteristics.
- The need for additional services.
- Available data on outcomes including (but not limited) to:
 - Linkages to ongoing services.
 - Preventing mental illnesses from becoming severe and disabling.
 - Improving timely access to services for underserved populations.
 - Providing outreach to families, employers, health care providers, and others to recognize the early signs of mental illness.
 - Reducing stigma and discrimination.
 - Preventing negative outcomes (e.g., suicide and attempted suicide, school failure or dropout).

Opportunities and Next Steps: Developing the MHSSA Evaluation

The Commission has disseminated MHSSA funds, services have been implemented, and a basic data reporting and monitoring process has begun. The Commission is now embarking on the next stage of developing the MHSSA evaluation. The next steps for evaluating the MHSSA include developing a theory of change or logic model; identifying a plan, process, and strategy for community engagement; and outlining a process for data reporting, analysis, data dissemination, program improvement, and community feedback. Our aim is that the evaluation plan will reflect the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as included in the Commission's forthcoming Racial Equity Action Plan, and be in alignment with the goals of the MHSSA to address disparities and the mental health needs of underserved and high-risk youth.

As mentioned above, the process for developing a strategic data monitoring and reporting plan will incorporate but not be limited to the following:

1. Engaging partners to inform the development of performance outcomes. The Commission will engage MHSSA grant partners, students, families, state and local agencies, and community partners to understand their needs and how performance measures can support those needs. A key goal of MHSSA is to reach underserved and high-risk groups. Engagement with these groups will be critical to developing relevant and appropriate metrics.

2. Document and analyze MHSSA projects. The Commission will engage local partners to document how funds are being used, the range of services that are offered, and lessons learned by local partners on the impact of the MHSSA programs.
3. Conduct landscape analysis to understand MHSSA in context. The Commission's analysis will explore how local partners have worked to access MHSSA and other funding to address school mental health goals. This analysis will improve understanding of opportunities to sustainably fund school mental health strategies.
4. Identify performance metrics and report on outcomes. Based on community-defined priorities, the Commission will identify relevant outcomes that align with the MHSSA and can be monitored with available data from grantee reporting and/or existing data systems that the Commission can access.
5. Provide recommendations for best practices. In response to the information obtained from performance metrics, ongoing engagement with local partners, learning collaboratives, and related community engagement activities, the Commission will identify best practices and recommendations to fortify statewide efforts to meet the mental health needs of children, youth, and young adults through school-based and related mental health strategies.

The Commission is seeking to partner with one or more external evaluators to develop the following:

- An evaluation framework and process.
- An understanding of how local schools and communities are leveraging various funding streams related to student mental health.
- A common set of student mental health metrics that can apply across different initiatives and programs.

The Commission is in the process of reviewing these initial submissions, and will rate the submissions based on their experience: (1) conducting statewide evaluations, particularly of heterogeneous school mental health strategies; (2) incorporating principles of diversity, equity and inclusion into an evaluation framework; (3) conducting community outreach and engagement; (4) developing statewide performance metrics for monitoring and reporting; and (5) partnering with local, state and national entities. The goal is for the Commission to establish a partnership with an external evaluator by the end of 2022.