

OCTOBER 2022

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Urban Community Collaboration



Seeds of Health, Inc. of Milwaukee

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Seeds of Health is the organization that runs a network of schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, including Seeds of Health Elementary School, Tenor High School – Cathedral Square, Tenor High School – Journal Square, and Veritas High School. Our Integrated Mental Health School Model is delivered through a strong partnership with Wellpoint Health Network (formerly SaintA). We have established a clinic within each of our schools where students can receive direct therapy services from one of two therapists who also coordinate with parents on their child's progress.

Additionally, these therapists provide consultation to teachers and staff to address students' mental health needs in the classroom and conduct student small groups as well. Building on our partnership, Seeds of Health has worked to intentionally integrate a deeper focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into the culture of each of our schools through staff professional development, extra-curricular opportunities, and the addition of an Impact Coordinator at Seeds of Health Elementary.

UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS

Seeds of Health's relationship with Wellpoint began several years ago as we worked to develop more trauma informed schools through train-the-trainer workshops. Recognizing the growing mental health needs of our students, we significantly deepened our partnership. Together, we worked to build an Integrated Mental Health School Model to support students and staff at our charter schools, adding clinics to and ensuring dedicated therapy time for each. These therapists have become a part of our school communities with authentic insight into our student & teacher challenges.

As our partnership has grown, so too have our efforts to broadly incorporate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into all that we do at Seeds of Health. At every level, teachers who have received professional development in SEL have worked SEL time into their schedules, helping students increase their ability to connect with each other, express their emotions, and address mental health strains. The newly created Impact Coordinator position at Seeds of Health Elementary School assists with the care and wellbeing of students, families, and staff. The Impact Coordinator meets with individual students for social-emotional support, teaches additional social-emotional lessons, delivers staff development on self-care and trauma sensitive interactions with students, and will be offering in-person parent sessions next school year.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

Seeds of Health Executive Director and Assistant Executive Director

Seeds of Health Director of Human Resources

Wellpoint Leadership & Therapists

Mental Health Navigators

Seeds of Health Elementary Impact Coordinator

School counselors

School teachers & staff

RESPONDING TO COVID IMPACTS

So many of our kids are re-learning the norms of school procedures, expectations, and social interactions because of disruptions caused by COVID-19. The social-emotional impacts have been significant, especially for students like ours, for whom the effects of the pandemic have been magnified by poverty and trauma. These impacts complicate how our students navigate their relationships with their peers and with teachers and staff. As a result, we have worked with our partners to establish "lunch bunches" and small groups at our high schools through which students explore social norms, healthy relationships, leadership, and reintegrating into the school community. At Seeds of Health Elementary, teachers consult with their dedicated therapist one-on-one to learn strategies for addressing similar issues with their students.





REFERRAL PATHWAYS

This year (2021-22), we saw more referrals than ever before, in part because our need has become so great, but also because of our streamlined referral process, supported by our new Mental Health Navigator. Referrals come from therapists, teachers, parents, and students themselves, which is made possible by increased awareness of the Integrated Mental Health School Model among the entire Seeds of Health community (including through training at all-staff and new teacher orientations). Therapists have been increasingly able to refer students to therapy due to their interactions with the broader student body during small groups and lunch bunches.

INTEGRATED MENTAL HEALTH

The Integrated Mental Health School Model has been critical as we work to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and address increasing mental health issues among our students. Without this program, the vast majority of students receiving direct therapy services would otherwise not have access to this kind of treatment. With a clinic located onsite, we are helping to reduce barriers to access, such as transportation, inconvenience, stigma & language. Coordination among school staff, therapists, and families became much more seamless, allowing students to get the help they need. Teachers have also expressed their gratitude for the Integrated Mental Health School Model, which provides them access to more resources and strategies to address the manifestation of mental health issues in the classroom. Though we still have work to do, the result is greater wellbeing for our young people.

FOCUS ON EQUITY

System-wide, 85% of Seeds of Health students are economically disadvantaged. Data indicate that an increasingly greater share carry with them an “invisible backpack” of issues stemming from poverty, parent incarceration, transience, neglect, and neighborhood violence. This kind of trauma is associated with behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health challenges, all of which were exacerbated by COVID-19. Cultural responsiveness is imperative, and Seeds of Health serves a student body that is 78% Latino, and approximately 44% of elementary students speak English as a second language. Our therapists provide culturally responsive supports, and our Seeds of Health Elementary School therapist is bilingual, easing the language barriers with students and families. Additionally, as a leader in Trauma Informed Care, Wellpoint offers consultation grounded in an understanding of the kinds of challenges and traumas our students have experienced.

SUBMITTED BY

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*a partnership of the **Coalition for Expanding School-Based Mental Health in Wisconsin** & **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction***

