

OCTOBER 2024

# SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Get Kids Ahead Initiative



## Eau Claire Area School District

### *OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND*

Eau Claire's comprehensive school mental health system is embedded within the Equitable Multi-Level System of Support (EMLSS) framework. This framework is how we provide equitable resources, practices, and services for all students. As we look at the tiers of the framework and the work that occurs within each layer, Community partners providing School-Based Mental Health services is a Tier III support/intervention that is provided as an addition to what is occurring at Tier I and Tier II. This provides a continuum of effective and sustainable services to students. In addition to the EMLSS, the WI School Mental Health Framework is a tool we use in guiding best practices on building and sustaining a comprehensive system for mental health needs.

### *KEY CONTRIBUTORS*



We are fortunate to have many key players to support our comprehensive mental health supports! Having a Mental Health Coordinator and ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs) Coordinator for the district has been instrumental in building systemic implementation of mental health and ATOD supports and resources. Collaboration with our school mental health professionals (school counselor, social worker, school psychologists) provides the district an opportunity to collectively review data, implement practices and strengthen the comprehensive mental health system overall. Our mental health professionals are pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of our comprehensive mental health system.



### **UNIVERSAL APPROACHES**

At the Tier I level, every student from Pre-K through 12th grade has access to explicit SEL instruction through **CharacterStrong**, an evidence-based curriculum. As our district continues to review and revise curriculum, the DPI SEL competencies are integrated into each subject K-12.

According to the 2023-24 Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) results, all 21 of our schools in the Eau Claire Area School District are currently implementing their universal practices to fidelity with their Tier 1 Positive Behavior Interventions and Support systems.

All staff employed by ECASD also have access to our Employee Assistance Program through an organization called REALivng, which includes a mental health resource that provides up to four free counseling sessions per school year for any district employee and their family members. This same organization also supports our district wellness team in implementing mental wellness activities and information for all staff.

With the addition of a full-time ATOD coordinator role in the ECASD, there were many ATOD initiatives implemented and/or strengthened. In all thirteen of our elementary schools, school counselors use the evidence-based "Too Good for Drugs" curriculum in grades 3-5 as part of their universal SEL school counselor classroom lessons. This curriculum not only addresses how to make safe and healthy choices, but also broadens the student's sense of self-efficacy and confidence.

### **REFERRAL PATHWAYS & TIER II EXPANSION**

With the recent addition of our universal SEL curriculum through CharacterStrong, we have also adopted the Tier II Process from CharacterStrong to strengthen and implement clear and concise Tier II practices. For the first time, ECASD now has a Tier II team at every school that is functioning at fidelity according to the 2023-24 TFI results.

This extensive work at the Tier II level helps to ensure we are matching student strengths and needs to the appropriate intervention, and it has allowed schools to decrease the need for Tier III interventions. Our Tier II supports include, but are not limited to, small group and individual social-emotional skill-building, mentoring, daily check-ins, and training for secondary school mental health professionals to implement the "Too Good for Drugs" ATOD curriculum at the secondary level.

### **PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES**

Administrators and school mental health professionals work closely with families in the problem-solving process to ensure students are receiving the most appropriate mental health and ATOD supports if needed. ECASD also utilizes grant funding to provide financial assistance to families who are not able to access mental health therapy due to financial and/or transportation barriers.





## THE IMPACT OF THE GET KIDS AHEAD INITIATIVE FUNDING



Our district utilized the Get Kids Ahead Initiative funding to provide direct school-based mental health services, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training, and trauma-informed practices to school district staff. We were also able to hire an ATOD coordinator at the district level.

The direct services were provided via a partnership with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. The contracted service through Children's allows a full-time therapist to provide direct therapeutic services to students in our two largest middle schools. Due to proximity, she is able to collaborate with staff on a more consistent basis, as well as provide professional learning to help reduce stigma and advance mental health awareness to students and staff. Through this model, services were billed via third party; however, for students/families without insurance or with significant financial barriers, Children's is able to provide funds to support services. Knowing there was financial support, the identification process was a team approach to ensure the students who met the criteria for this service were appropriately identified.

The Nonviolent Crisis Intervention and trauma-informed practices training for district staff allowed hourly staff (who typically don't receive this type of training) to participate. This allowed for our Special Education Assistants, who have direct contact with some of our most underserved and underrepresented students, to expand their knowledge and skills to help create a comprehensive, asset-based, and equitable mental health system.

With the addition of a full-time ATOD coordinator, our prevention and intervention work is more comprehensive and collaborative with staff, families, students, and the broader Eau Claire community. We offer ATOD therapy for our high school students, contracted mentoring for our students in our secondary charter school and Graduate Credit Achievement Program, "How to Quite Vaping" workbooks for all secondary buildings, and SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) training and implementation for all secondary buildings.

## CENTERING EQUITY

The Eau Claire Area School District's School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) system was and continues to be built on fundamentals that center equity and meeting the mental health needs of historically underserved students. Our SBMH system is designated for students who are experiencing significant barriers to accessing mental health services outside of the school day. The identification process leverages a team approach to ensure the limited SBMH spots are reserved for the students who match our criteria. Continued collaboration between therapist, family and school ensures there is a continuum of supports with additional layers as needed.

## OUTCOMES

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the city of Eau Claire experienced the unfortunate closures of two hospitals and a behavioral health clinic. This had a significant impact on our ability to provide direct mental health and crisis services to our students. There continue to be challenges and barriers due to this; however, the response from our school mental health professionals allowed us to support our students and families in the best way possible.

Our partnership with the Eau Claire Department of Human Services was also a significant asset, as we were in constant communication on how to pivot and tap all resources available to support students with mental health needs. Our ability to quickly adapt to this change is, in large part, due to the hard work that was done in establishing a comprehensive mental health system. With continued collaboration and support with all stakeholders, this system will continue to provide equitable resources, practices, and services for all students.

## SUBMITTED BY

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## SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHTS

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



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