

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Get Kids Ahead Initiative



Merrill Area Public School District

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the 2022-23 school year, members from the pupil services team attended DPI's Mental Health Academy. The MAPS Academy team members worked together with teachers and other staff districtwide to analyze our students' emotional/behavioral needs in a systematic analysis. Through that process, one priority area was identified as the need for a Universal SEL curriculum. From this, 7 Mindsets was found to best meet the needs identified. Beginning the 23-24 school year, MAPS began implementing 7 Mindsets district-wide. In addition, MAPS identified the value and need for community partnerships with licensed therapists. We were able to partner with community agencies to have a licensed therapist for students within each building beginning the 23-24 school year, which supports student mental health and reduces barriers of access.

We are also now offering a unique opportunity for select students at the middle and high school levels of A.R.T. (Anger Replacement Therapy) groups, co-facilitated by a school social worker and a licensed mental health professional. Furthermore, the MAPS Mental Health Matters Alliance was created last year, which is made up of school personnel, parent advocates, and community members/agencies. This has provided a comprehensive look at mental health within the schools, as well as from a community perspective. Priority steps based on assessment data have determined the focus and work of this group to review proactive and preventative measures, parent engagement, as well as school-based mental health.

REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Through the MAPS Mental Health Matters Alliance, a framework and flowchart were created that show our mapping of resources, referrals, and connecting students. This visual helps provide information to all staff about resources we have and how/with whom to connect. This information is also reviewed as a pupil services team district-wide. District school social worker meetings also take place to specifically review and discuss appropriate resources and community partners.

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Merrill Area Public Schools partner with community agencies like Children’s Wisconsin to enhance our processes of family engagement. For example, we’ve piloted and will expand our parent engagement through Botvin Lifeskills for both AODA concerns and mental health. We’ve identified barriers to family engagement that we hope to eliminate, and we are prepared to have choices offered for parents that will be most conducive to their needs.

EQUITY & MEETING NEEDS OF MARGINALIZED STUDENTS

Through our Equitable Multi-Level Systems of Support, our building-level teams work to review student needs based on the level of risk. Beginning the 23-24 school year, we’ve completed an EMLSS district mapping to identify resources and supports across tiers of students, not only academically but also to encompass behavioral and social/emotional needs and supports as well, across all levels and student groups. School social workers also use various screeners when concerns arise to provide additional data regarding the increased risk factors.

OUTCOMES

As our mental health increase, the outcomes of this system allow for staff to better understand and direct students to available resources. The comprehensive approach—from universal SEL through therapists in buildings and individual referrals along with parent engagement—allow for a continuum of services to best meet individual student needs.



THE IMPACT OF THE GET KIDS AHEAD INITIATIVE

This funding has helped support professional development for staff, as well as materials to support students at school. For example, we were able to hire a behavior intervention specialist, who focuses on restorative practices with students, processing feelings, and engaging resources as determined necessary if and when children disclose mental health needs/concerns.

Items necessary for the Universal SEL implementation of 7 Mindsets were purchased with Getting Kids Ahead funds, as well as building-level SEL coaches. These coaching positions were paramount in getting our universal SEL off the ground and consistent throughout the first year implementation.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS



Administration, Pupil Services Team, Community Partners, Board of Education



LOOKING AHEAD

We are excited about the work of our comprehensive mental health system and continue to set goals and action steps to enhance our systems based on identified needs.

SUBMITTED BY

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

