



Secondary-level Mental Health Update

Office of Student Services

November 20, 2023



NEWTON

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Equity & Excellence

Goal of Presentation

To provide an overview of the state of student mental health needs within our secondary schools. Additionally, we will share the current structures and systems that are meeting this lived reality, and communicate areas for improvement within our structures and supports.

Pre-Pandemic

1. Rise social-emotional distress

- Results from Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Signs of Suicide endorsements
- Initial referrals for 504/Special Education for Anxiety/Depression-related diagnoses
- Anecdotal/qualitative data on student experiences

2. Systemic barriers to accessing social emotional supports

- Inadequate investment in staffing levels, framework for general education Tier 1 and Tier 2 social emotional supports.

Middle School - Trends

- Anxiety
- School & class avoidance
- Increase in students transitioning to/from hospitals/day programs
- Skills deficits
 - Decreased resiliency
 - Low frustration and discomfort tolerance
 - Executive Functioning

High School - Trends

- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Attendance**
 - **Tardiness**
 - **Chronic absenteeism/School refusal**
- **Social skills deficits**
 - **Younger-than-expected behaviors**
 - **Executive Functioning**
- **Hospitalizations**

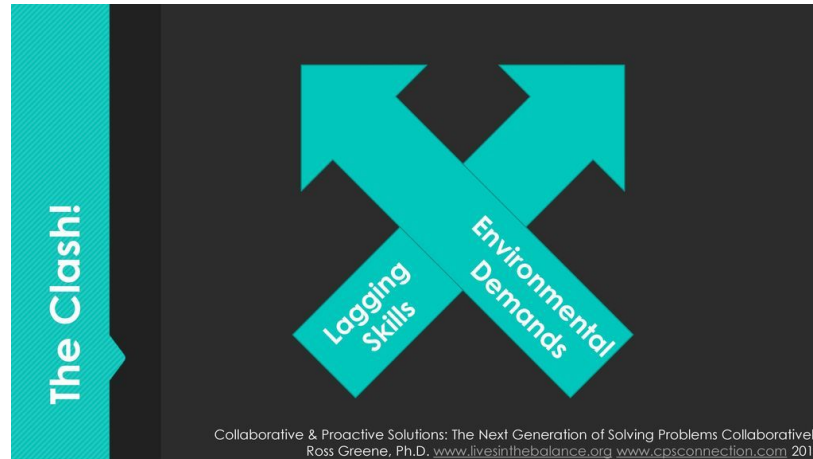
William-James Interface Referral Data

- 2019-2023: On average 500 referrals
- ~ 55% for children ages 6-17
 - Most referrals are for individual therapy
- Top presenting issues:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Suicidal ideation

Throughlines

Internalized and externalized signs of anxiety-related disorders, depression, mood disorders, and personality disorders often manifest as dysregulation of emotional and/or behavioral control

Lagging skills often at the root of the dysregulation



The Need for a Robust Tiered System of Support

While some environmental demands can be minimized via accommodation, skill development is the most cost-effective and empowering approach for students

Hundreds of independent studies consistently demonstrate:
Social and emotional learning benefits students.



“SEL programs appear to have as great a long-term impact on academic growth as has been found for programs designed specifically to support academic learning.”

*Researchers Joseph Mahoney, Joseph Durlak, and Roger Weissberg
In An Update on Social and Emotional Learning Outcome Research, 2018*



DID YOU KNOW?

Research confirms: Social and emotional learning is a wise financial investment.

The average return on investment for six evidence-based programs is 11 to 1, according to cost-benefit research.



This means for every dollar invested in SEL, there is an \$11 return from costs not incurred.



Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, and Zander, 2015.



The **Vision** of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): SEL and Mental Health

Tier 3: High Frequency, Individualized

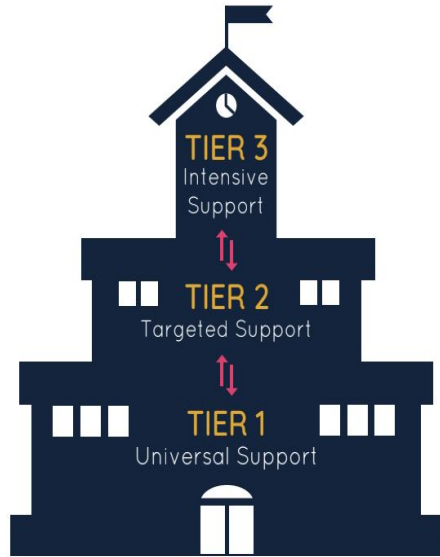
- Counselor
- Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Adjustment Counselor

Tier 2: Moderate Frequency, Small group

- Counselor
- Psychologist
- SEL interventionist
- Social Worker
- Adjustment Counselor

Tier 1: Brief, Whole Class

- General Education Teacher- and Dean-led, in consultation with and coaching by:
 - All SEL and mental health staff
 - Executive Functioning
 - Circles
 - Stress Management

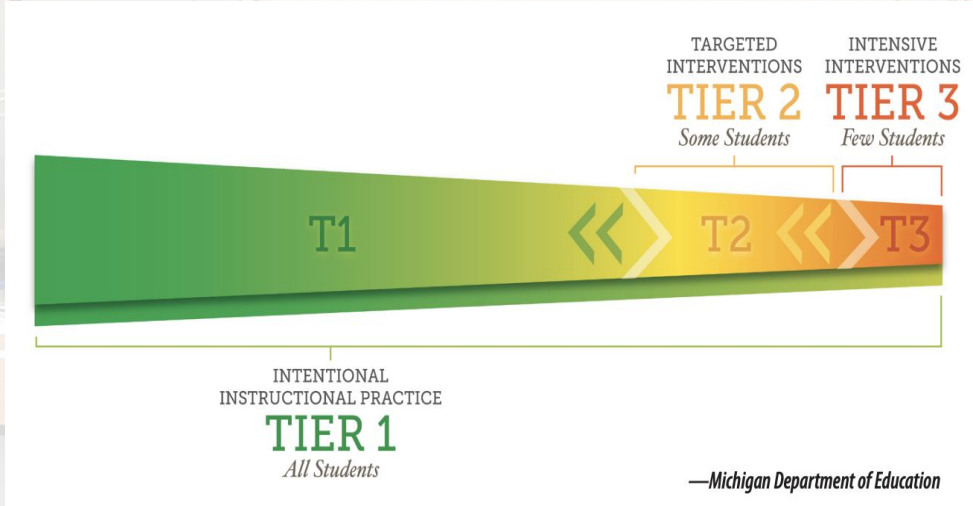


Primary Areas of Need

to actualize our schools being multi-tiered systems of support for the SEL and mental health needs for all students

Structural Barrier 1	Structural Barrier 2
Due to inadequate mental health staffing, (mental health) staff must prioritize mandated services and crisis response	Competing demands do not allow space for explicit SEL instruction or screening

Structural Barrier #1: Inadequate mental health positions



- Most of our staff are spending time at Tiers 2 & 3, leaving little to no time to collaborate with general educators/Deans on Tier 1
- Mirrors current country's trends in public schooling

Structural Barrier #2: Competing demands do not allow space for explicit SEL instruction or screening

- Preference toward individual support
- Extension/Intervention (i.e., WIN) Blocks are for multiple purposes
- Limited staffing does not allow for short-term skills based groups for all students
 - Elementary model allows for SEL interventionist and coaches to run short-term groups but no such positions at the secondary level*
- Limited capacity for infrastructure support with screener implementation

*Bigelow and NNHS have 1 SEL Interventionist each for whole school



Thank You

A Fundamental Shift: Mental Health is an Asset and not a Disorder

- Not long ago in NPS the words “mental health” and “mental health diagnosis/disorder” were used interchangeably
- Students with and without formal mental health diagnoses can experience fluctuations in their mental health and can proactively strengthen their mental health
- Data show steep increase in anxiety/depression and related disorders, predating pandemic effects



Mental Health Services in Newton Public Schools

- Largely a responsive approach to acute needs developed over time
- Development of special education programming for students with social-emotional disabilities (Central HS, Springboard, Southside/Pilot, Compass)
- Cast a systemic issue as individual pathologies
- Minimal investment in tiered support services available to students in general education
 - insufficient student access to school adjustment counselor/school social worker support
 - increase in proportion of school guidance counselor time providing intensive mental health counseling services to a small portion of their caseload



Student Services Department Work

Unpacking Ableism

“Ableism is the discrimination or prejudice against people who have disabilities. Ableism can take the form of ideas and assumptions, stereotypes, attitudes and practices, physical barriers in the environment, or larger scale oppression. It is oftentimes unintentional and most people are completely unaware of the impact of their words or actions.” -Urban Dictionary

Ableism is deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism

Ableism perpetuates a negative view of disability. It frames being nondisabled as the ideal and disability as a flaw or abnormality.

It is an ongoing pursuit to recognize and understand both our own ableism as well as where systemic ableism exists in our district



Types of Ableism to Consider in the District

Institutional Ableism

includes the physical barriers, policies, laws, regulations and practices that exclude people with disabilities from full participation and equal opportunity.

Interpersonal Ableism

ableism that occurs in social interactions and relationships in daily life. For instance, telling a student that they can “overcome” their disability.



Internalized Ableism

when a disabled person discriminates against themselves and other disabled people by holding the view that disability is something to be ashamed of, or something to hide, or by refusing accessibility or support.

High Gear/Low Gear

- Culturally, the phrase “High Gear” has a positive connotation (hustle, efficiency, leverage)
- Low Gear ≠ Less Valuable
- Where we place rewards, what we praise, and how we deliver feedback all shape the meaning we attach to high gear work, low gear work and everything in between
 - Many of our kids have learned to fear and be ashamed of struggling through low gear learning
 - Learning to shift gears is a necessary condition for safe operation
 - Finding sixth gear with a learner’s permit

2023: Issues We Face

1. **Anxiety**
2. **Depression**
3. **Attendance**
 - **Tardiness**
 - **Chronic absenteeism/School refusal**
4. **Social skills deficits**
 - **Younger-than-expected behaviors**
 - **Executive Functioning**
5. **Hospitalizations**
6. **Increase in referrals for special education testing**

1.



