School Connectedness

A key organizing principle to focus our efforts on tackling problems in mental health, school safety, and gun violence among Connecticut youth.

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Thank You

- This presentation builds on work I've been doing in collaboration with Jeana Bracey, PhD, who directs the School-Based Diversion Initiative at the Child Health Development Institute.

- Two years of collaboration with Abby Anderson, Executive Director of the CT Juvenile Justice Alliance and my Co-Chair at the Children's Committee of the Keep the Promise Coalition.

- Feedback and guidance from JoAnn Freiberg, PhD, Connecticut's top expert at the SDE on bullying, school climate, and character education.

My Professional Background

- Board certified general psychiatrist.

- Completing child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship by June 30, 2013.

- Mental health advocate.

- Member of the Schools Committee of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

- Practicing child and adolescent psychiatry in the following settings: child guidance clinic outpatient setting, IICAPS, SBHC, partial hospital program, emergency room, inpatient acute care, consultation to pediatricians.

- Starting a telepsychiatry program.

What is Mental Health?

- WHO Definition
  - *Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.*

- Other elements
  - Peace of mind
  - Good sleep
  - Adaptive and fruitful interpersonal relationships

What is Mental Illness?

- NIMH Definition
  - *A mental illness can be defined as a health condition that changes a person's thinking, feeling, or behavior (or all three) and that causes the person distress and difficulty in functioning.*

- Contributing Factors
  - Biological
  - Psychological
  - Social

What is Mental Illness?

- Major Categories of Disorders

Childhood Onset	Mood
Anxiety	Psychotic
Substance Use	Cognitive
Personality	Somatization

Who is Affected?

- EVERYONE!

- #1 cause of disability in the U.S.

- 50% of 13-18yo adolescents have a diagnosable emotional-behavioral problem.

- 22% of 13-18yo adolescents have a severely impairing emotional-behavioral problem.

- 20% of all doctor visits are related to anxiety disorders.

What is Child Development?

- Social

- Emotional

- Physical

- Cognitive

Converging and Interrelated Youth Crises in Connecticut

- **#1 academic achievement gap in the U.S.**

- **Poor access to mental health assessment and treatment services**

- **Overreliance on exclusionary discipline practices in schools, including suspensions and expulsions**

- **High rates of in-school arrests despite lower rates of in-school violence**

Facts

- **1 in 15 Connecticut high school students attempted suicide in the last 12 months**
  - That works out to about 1 student in every classroom attempting suicide
  - Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 12-19 year-olds in the U.S. after unintentional injuries and homicides
  - Across the lifetime, suicides account for 60% of gun-related deaths compared to 37% for homicides
  - Suicide is the worst-case outcome of mental illness

Facts

- **20% of all youth aged 17 and under have a diagnosable and treatable emotional-behavioral disorder**
    - That translates to 160,000 youth in Connecticut currently struggling with mental illness
    - Only 20% of those youth have access to mental health care, leaving 128,000 Connecticut youth with untreated mental illness
    - About 75% of the 32,000 youth who did receive mental health care did so in the school setting
        - Our schools are the de facto mental health system of care
        - School social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, SBHC's

Facts

- **Too many youth with untreated mental illness are diverted to the juvenile justice population through what is known as the "school-to-prison pipeline"**
  - About two-thirds of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable mental illness
  - Students in grades pre-K to 12 who are suspended or expelled are more likely to drop out of school or end up in juvenile detention
  - Students who are arrested are 2x as likely to drop out of school
  - Arrested students who end up in court are 4x as likely to drop out of school

Facts

- **Connecticut's rates of <u>exclusionary discipline</u>, especially among minorities, are among the worst in the nation:**
  - Third-highest gap in suspension rates between black and white students
  - Third-highest suspension rates for black students with identified disabilities
  - In 2009, Hartford posted the highest suspension rate for Hispanic students at 44%
  - In 2009, black special education students had a 73% chance of being suspended in a single school year

The Kitchen: Interconnected Systems
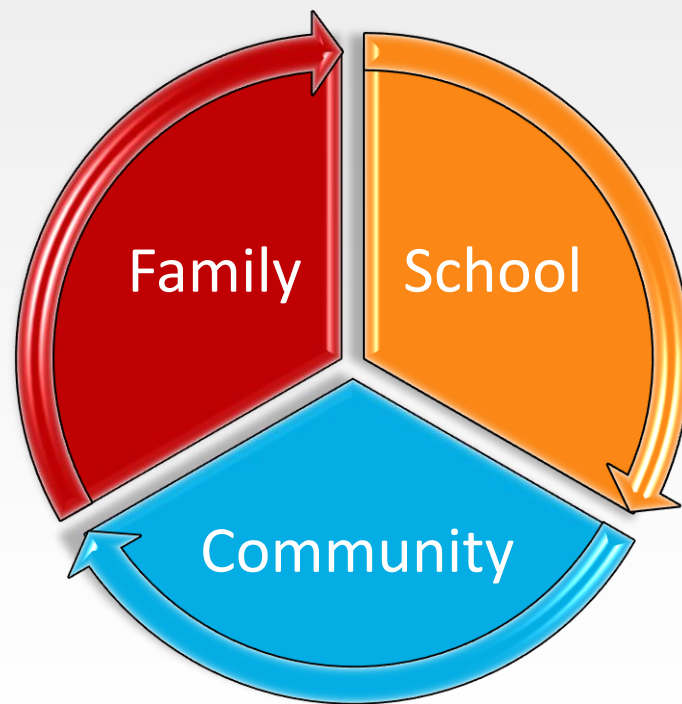
What's Cooking?

- Better mental health outcomes

- Improved academic outcomes

- Safer schools (emotional, physical, intellectual, social)

- Reduced gun violence

- Diminished flow in the school-to-prison pipeline

Lots of Great Cooks in the Kitchen

- Achievement Gap Task Force

- Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap

- Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety
  - Gun Violence Working Group
  - School Security Working Group
  - Mental Health Services Working Group

- Sandy Hook Advisory Commission

Lots of Great Ingredients in the Kitchen

School-Based Health Centers	School Climate Improvement Efforts	Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services
Local Interagency Service Teams	DCF Community Collaboratives	Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services
Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Child FIRST	School-Based Diversion Initiative
Juvenile Review Boards	ACCESS-MH	Birth to Three Services

Great Recipes

- Office of Program Review and Investigations
  - Access to Substance Abuse Treatment for Privately and Publicly Insured Youth (2012)
  - Adolescent Health in Connecticut (2012)

- Office of the Healthcare Advocate
  - Access to Mental Health and Substance Use Services (2012)

- Achievement Gap Task Force Recommendations (2012)

- CTAAP/CCCAP Mental Health Blueprint (2010)

An Organizing Principle for the Kitchen

- **School Connectedness**
  - *The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and supported by others in the school environment.*
  - The extent to which the developmental needs of pre-K to 12 youth are met by the school.

School Connectedness

- A well-researched, powerful protective factor in youth that reduces the likelihood of the following outcomes:

Emotional distress	Suicidality
Substance use	Maladaptive sexual behaviors
Delinquency	Violence
Academic problems	Gang membership

School Connectedness

- It is measurable and changeable
  - Two University of Washington studies demonstrated long-term benefits to boosting school connectedness
  - It is 'easier' to screen for school connectedness than for mental health problems

School Connectedness

- A sample questionnaire to measure School Connectedness
  - *How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:*
    - *I feel close to people at this school.*
    - *I am happy to be at this school.*
    - *I feel like I am part of this school.*
    - *The teachers at this school treat students fairly.*
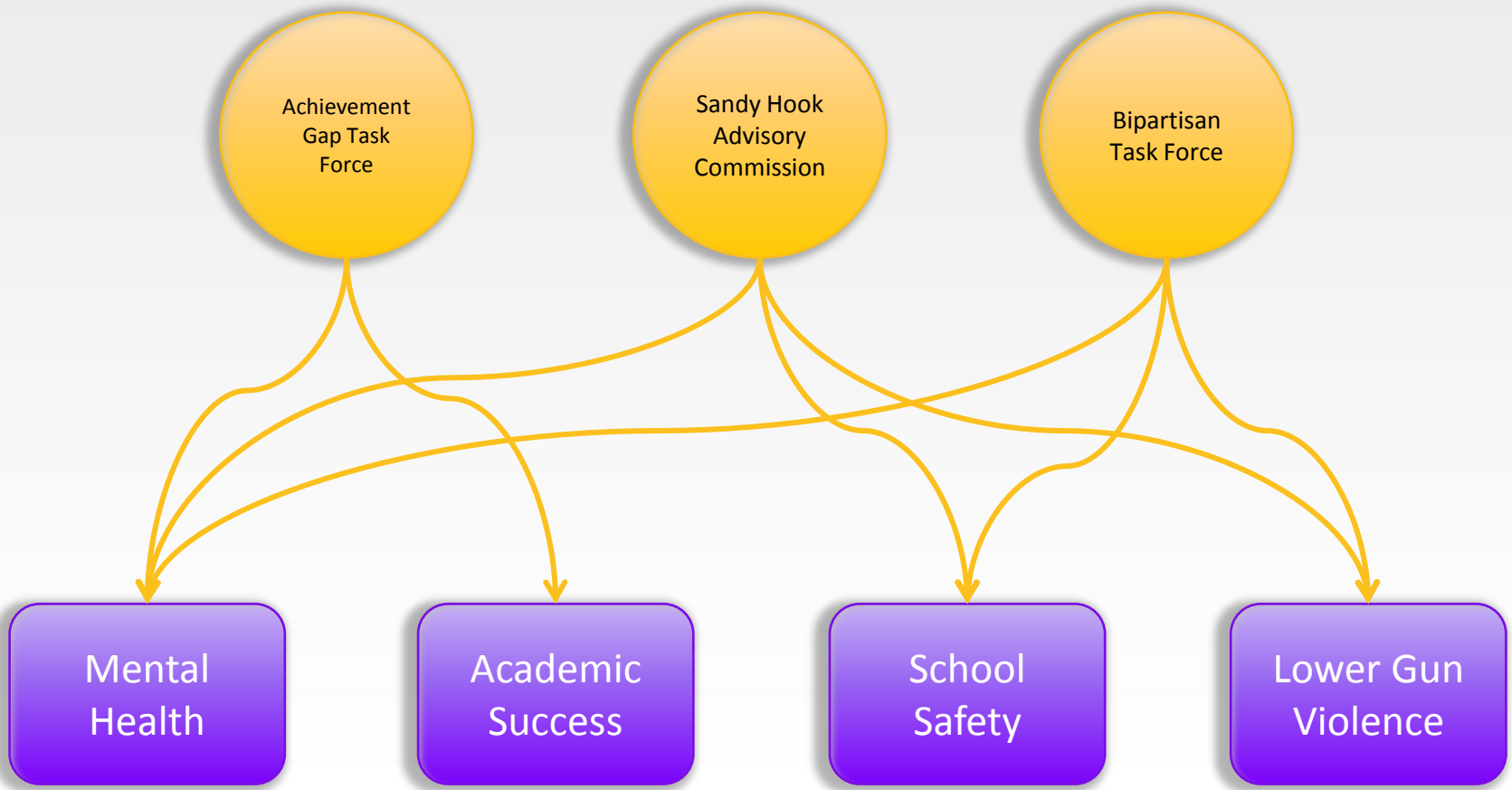   - *I feel safe in my school.*

School Connectedness

- ONE PRINCIPLE to tackle the converging crises affecting Connecticut youth.

- ONE PRINCIPLE to focus the energy, efforts, and resources of the talented cooks in our kitchen.
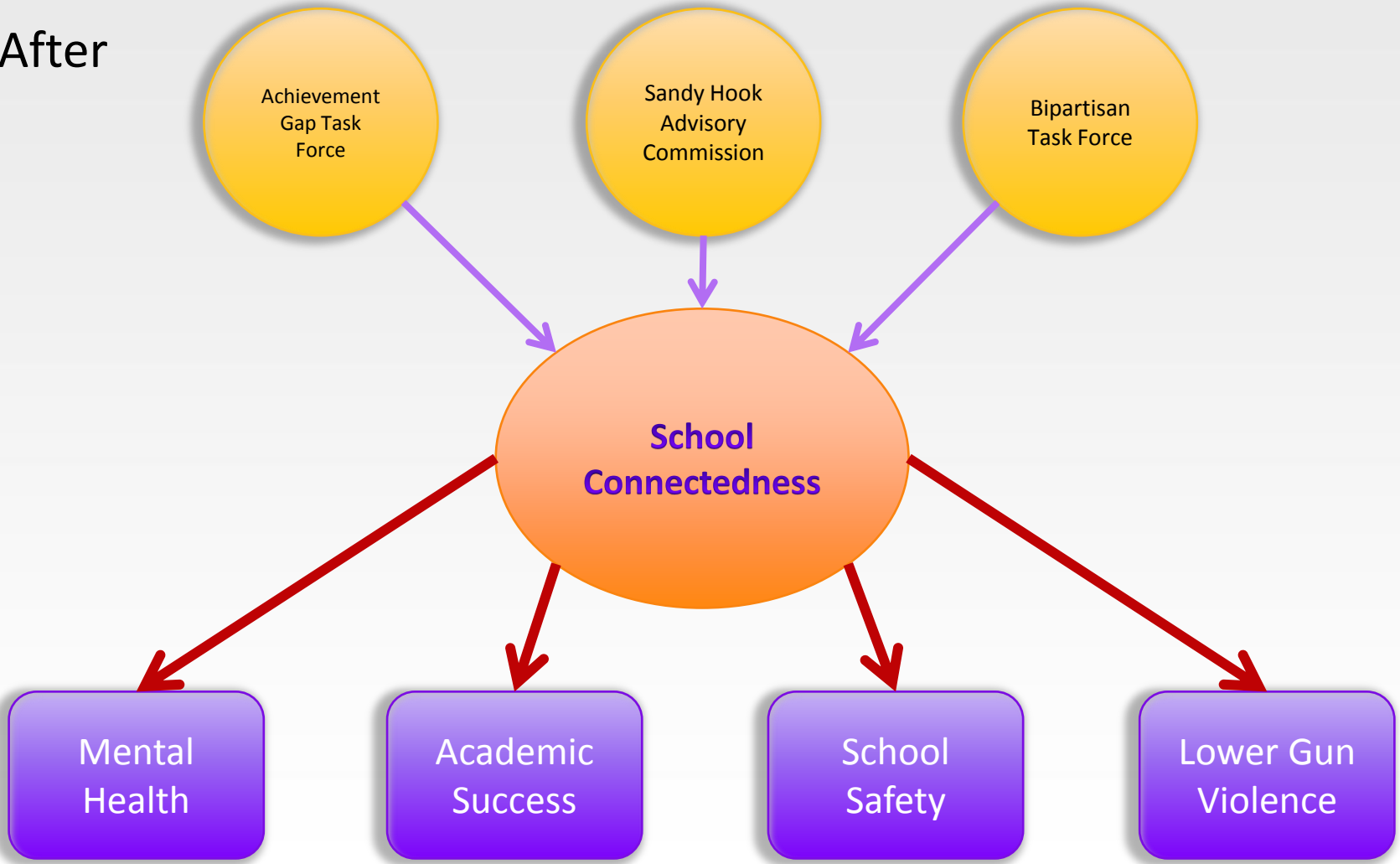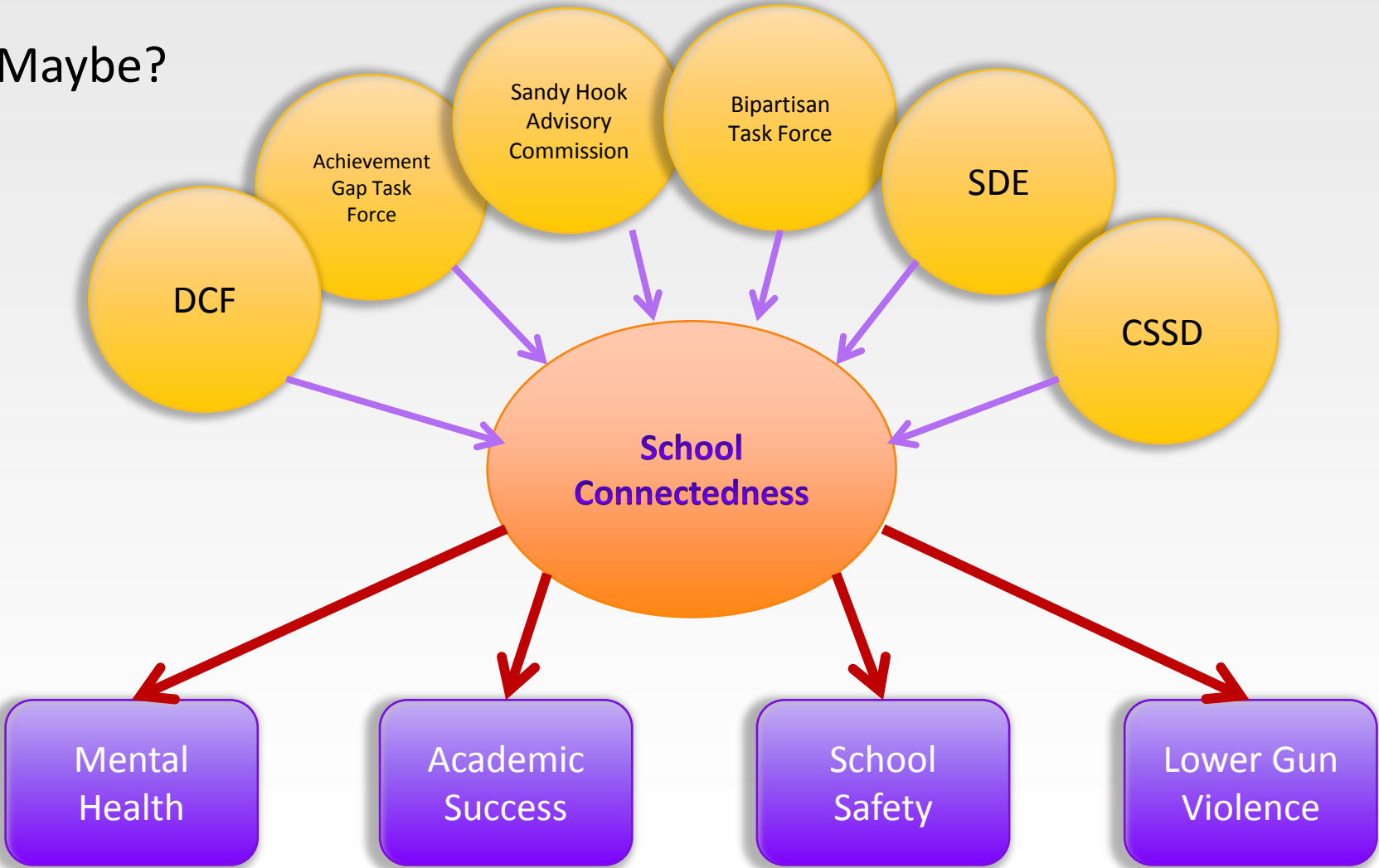
Before

About School Safety

- Don't think ONLY bullying and law enforcement!

- Think about preserving and protecting healthy development:
  - Emotional safety
  - Physical safety
  - Social safety
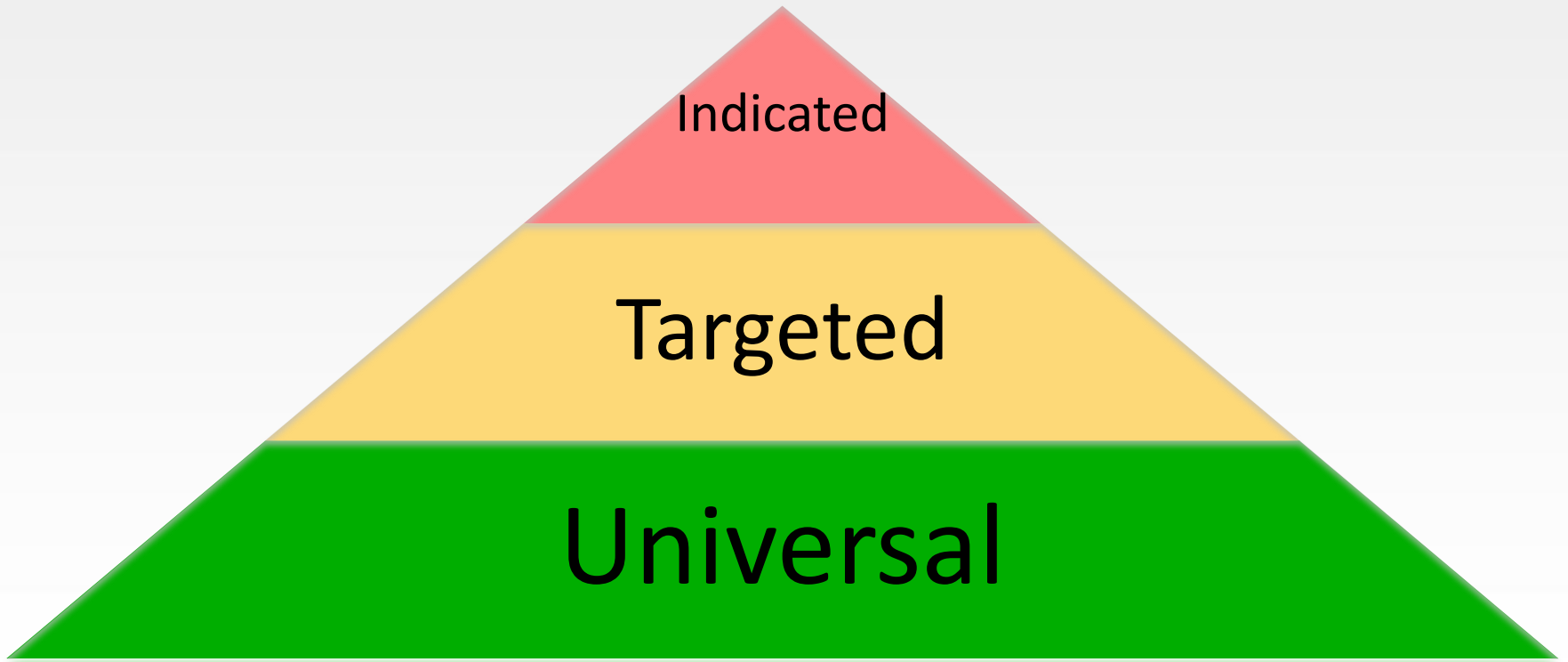 - Intellectual/cognitive safety

Public Health and Prevention

School Connectedness: Six Content Areas

	Universal	Targeted	Indicated
#1) School- and Classroom-Based Approach	• School social worker and school psychologist staffing. • Graduated response model and restorative justice. • Use of evidence-based classroom management strategies. • Ensure that professional development includes building awareness around psycho-social problems facing youth.		
#2) Crisis Response	• MOA between school and local EMPS provider. • MOA between school and local police department. • School-focused crisis teams to formulate an appropriate response. • Collaborate with neighboring schools and community agencies to integrate planning efforts (eg. JRB's).		

School Connectedness: Six Content Areas

	Universal	Targeted	Indicated
#3) Transition Supports	• Welcome and social support programs for newcomers. • Daily transition programs. • Summer or inter-session programs, including catch-up, recreation, and enrichment.		
#4) Home Involvement in Schooling	• Support service for family members at home, addressing basic needs and education. • Incentivize communication between home and school. • Incentivize the success of DCF Community Collaboratives and Local Interagency Service Teams.		

School Connectedness: Six Content Areas

	Universal	Targeted	Indicated
#5) Community Outreach	• Plan and implement outreach to recruit a wide range of community resources. • Connect school and community efforts to promote child and youth development (eg. Youth Service Bureaus) • Reach out to students and families who don't come to school regularly.		
#6) Student and Family Assistance	• Enhance access to direct interventions for physical and mental health, economic assistance (eg. SBHC's, Care Coordination). • Develop mechanism for resource coordination and integration to avoid duplication of efforts and money (eg. SBDI structure).		

Big Picture

- What are we trying to achieve?

  - Take existing assets and deploy them in a coordinated and integrated manner.

  - Promote academic engagement.

  - Promote family engagement and functioning.

  - Give students a sense of belonging to school, making them feel respected and heard.

  - Provide an organized, predictable, and fair learning environment through fair and equitable enforcement of school rules.

  - Engage students in school-based, non-academic extracurricular activities.

Big Picture

- What are we trying to achieve?

  - Make school likeable.

  - Give students a voice, facilitating a sense of autonomy and empowerment.

  - Promote positive and adaptive peer relationships.

  - Give students a sense of safety and security at school.

  - Help students feel close to and valued by teachers and school staff.

  - Schools become hubs for school-linked and community-based services and supports for children and families.

Big Picture

Strengthen this Continuum
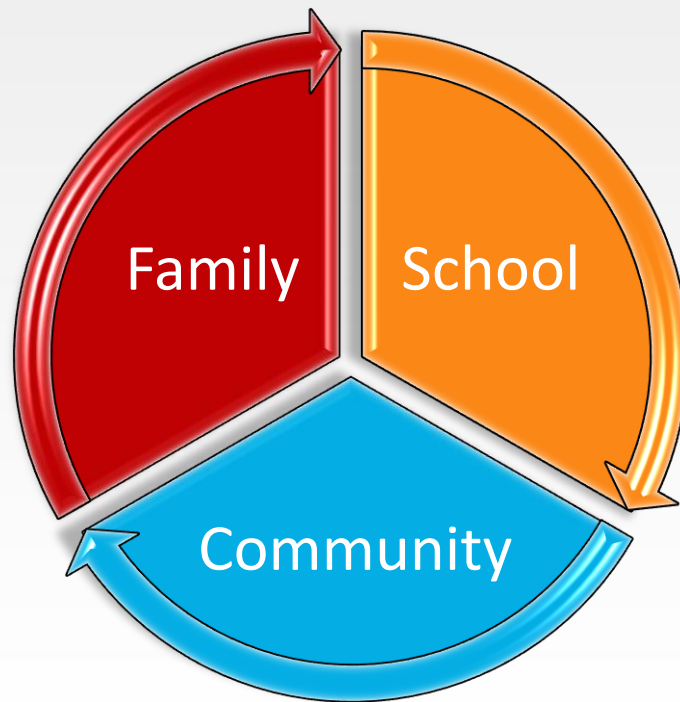
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