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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Co-Chair, Keep the Promise Coalition
April 12, 2013
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childhood Onset</th>
<th>Mood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Psychotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Somatization</td>
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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 exclusionary discipline, 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

Family

School

Community
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

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

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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional distress</td>
<td>Suicidality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>Maladaptive sexual behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic problems</td>
<td>Gang membership</td>
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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

- Mental Health
- Academic Success
- School Safety
- Lower Gun Violence

Achievement Gap Task Force
Sandy Hook Advisory Commission
Bipartisan Task Force
After

School Connectedness

Mental Health
Academic Success
School Safety
Lower Gun Violence

Achievement Gap Task Force
Sandy Hook Advisory Commission
Bipartisan Task Force
Maybe?

School Connectedness

- Mental Health
- Academic Success
- School Safety
- Lower Gun Violence

DCF
- DCF
- Achievement Gap Task Force

Sandy Hook Advisory Commission
- Sandy Hook Advisory Commission
- Bipartisan Task Force

SDE
- SDE

CSSD
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

- Universal
- Targeted
- Indicated
## School Connectedness: Six Content Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1) School- and Classroom-Based Approach</th>
<th>Universal</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
<th>Indicated</th>
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</thead>
</table>
|                                          | • 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. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#2) Crisis Response</th>
<th>Universal</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
<th>Indicated</th>
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</table>
|                     | • 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

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<tr>
<td><strong>#3) Transition Supports</strong></td>
<td>• Welcome and social support programs for newcomers.</td>
<td>• Daily transition programs.</td>
<td>• Summer or inter-session programs, including catch-up, recreation, and enrichment.</td>
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<td><strong>#4) Home Involvement in Schooling</strong></td>
<td>• Support service for family members at home, addressing basic needs and education.</td>
<td>• Incentivize communication between home and school.</td>
<td>• Incentivize the success of DCF Community Collaboratives and Local Interagency Service Teams.</td>
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## School Connectedness: Six Content Areas

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<th>#5) Community Outreach</th>
<th>Universal</th>
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<th>Indicated</th>
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</table>
|                        | • 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. | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#6) Student and Family Assistance</th>
<th>Universal</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
<th>Indicated</th>
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</table>
|                                   | • 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). | | |
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

Family

School

Community


Bibliography


