The unexpected closure and transition of the district! The Education Achievement Authority (EAA), a grantee of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative in Detroit, announced they would close their doors in July 2017 and merge schools into the newly reorganized and largest district in Michigan—the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD). This created real challenges in achieving collaboration across the current partnership structure, and in maintaining the services to schools, children, and families that were already being provided. The SS/HS team at the local and state level(s) struggled with the uncertainty of whether we would be able to move the important and impactful work of SS/HS forward with the transition.

The EAA school district had experienced enormous instability and challenges over several years, disparately impacting students, parents, and teachers in Detroit. We desperately needed to restore trust, and to develop a shared mission—this would lay the foundation for our work moving forward. This required district-level buy-in with key strategic alliances, and it was going to be challenging.

The SS/HS Community Management Team conducted a needs assessment and environmental scan. The data pointed to a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino students experiencing high rates of disciplinary referrals and suspensions. Several priority areas were identified, including the following:

- Ongoing issues of trauma, grief, and loss; lack of access or availability of prevention or treatment programs
- Lack of trained/credentialed staff and staff support
- Lack of collaboration and communication between school, community, and parents

These disparities informed the development of the work plan in two key ways: (a) identification of activities that could address the needs of students in alignment with DPSCD’s strategic plan; (b) strengthening key partnerships that could support students’ mental health and well-being and teacher’s professional development.

We prioritized several initiatives that aligned with students’ needs and the DPSCD Strategic Plan, which focuses on a whole-child approach to promote holistic well-being and building an exceptional and talented team of dedicated staff. This included providing professional development for teachers and staff in the following areas:

- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR): suicide prevention
- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Social and emotional learning

Strategic approaches were used to identify key partnerships and collaborations to build capacity, integration, and sustainability. Meeting the diverse needs of students within the scope of SS/HS became our main priority. To this end, Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority (DWMHA) and their providers were chosen as key partners.
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