



# IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

## COMMITMENT TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

“OUR FACULTIES NEED THIS TRAINING, AND IT IS PARAMOUNT TO OUR WORK MOVING FORWARD.”

— IRANETTA WRIGHT  
DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT,  
DETROIT COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
DISTRICT

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.

## ➔ SOLUTION

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.

## ➔ CHALLENGE

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

## CULTURE OF OUR CLASSROOMS

“Both trainings are essential to improve the culture of our classrooms. Mental health and SEL training gave me additional tools needed for the elementary classroom.”

– Elementary teacher,  
Detroit Public Schools Community  
District

## SHARED MISSION

**“The transition required establishing trusting relationships in a very short period, moving beyond our comfort zones and organizational missions (at the state, district, and local community partners level) to establish a shared mission for both the education and well-being of children.”**

– Deborah Harris-Swan  
LMSW, Project Manager  
Safe Schools/Healthy Students

## → RESULTS

Our work resulted in tangible benefits in the trainings provided as well as the building and maintaining of key strategic partnerships. During the summer, SS/HS and community partners provided nine trainings in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and four trainings in social and emotional learning (SEL). **Ninety percent of teachers trained said they were committed to using the information learned to assist students.**

## → COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

- Some of the factors that helped to build collaboration included the strong partnership built with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), which was critical to the continuation of the SS/HS grant, before, during and after the transition of the EAA schools to DPSCD. From analysis of 2 years of implementation data, the MDE recognized the impact the SS/HS framework had on improving the learning conditions for students and families and became even more committed to integrating and aligning these efforts with DPSCD’s strategic plan and organizational structure. Leadership buy-in and action became imperative from both the MDE and DPSCD to remove barriers and support the strong community partnership that had already been established.
- The SS/HS State Coordinator connected the SS/HS Project Manager to the Senior Public Health Officer and Deputy Superintendent of Schools.
- The SS/HS Project Manager connected the Senior Public Health Officer and the Program Supervisor to DWMHA and other key partners to continue the work in already identified schools and explore expanding to other schools.

## → SUSTAINING SUCCESS

In August 2018, DPSCD’s Deputy Superintendent of Schools sent an email to school principals in partnership schools to notify them of YMHFA, suicide prevention, and social and emotional learning trainings and to encourage teachers

to attend. Survey responses indicate that the training has been positive, and teachers are committed to using the information to assist their students.

- Currently, DPSCD plans to sustain the Partnership Schools training in YMHFA and SEL, and is committed to expanding the trainings district-wide over time.
- DWMHA is committed to providing other training, including Trauma Loss in Children and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), to DPSCD staff.
- DPSCD has added Dean of Climate and Culture positions and added Emotional Learning Curriculum training for ELA and social studies teachers and plans to expand these trainings district-wide.

For more information about the program, contact:  
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