



Ocean City School District

Teen Suicide

This is more than us, this takes a village.

Ocean City School District

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“Every school in our district had a crisis plan. But suicide ... it wasn’t on my agenda. We just did not think it was going to happen here. Unfortunately, we learned the hard way. It was only after we had a suicide that we realized we needed to take a comprehensive approach to preventing a tragedy like this. And we realized we needed to involve everybody – the school staff, students, parents and the community.”

Superintendent in a New England School District

Youth who abuse drugs, attempt suicide, experience abuse, are anorexic or bulimic, and suffer from anxiety, obsessions, or compulsions have something in common: They all go to school.

December 2014, Kappan Magazine



Behind every student dealing with a mental health issue is a family trying to grasp what’s happening to their child and struggling to do their best.

December 2014, Kappan Magazine

Strategic Planning

Student Support Services

“Consistency, Collaboration and Communication regarding teen mental health and wellness”

Process

The New Jersey School Boards Association facilitator provided:

- Initial meeting with the Superintendent, Board President, and other key members to explain the process and distribute materials
- Four planning meetings, each approximately a few weeks apart and 1 ½ hrs/meeting, cross sections of our community, families and schools as participants
- Facilitator prepared the composite report and the Administrative team prepared the action plans based on the developed goals and strategies.



Ad-Hoc Committee Goals & Action Plans

Goal 1: Communication in Addressing Youth Mental Health Awareness: Define, develop and promote a culture of awareness and acceptance of youth mental health and wellness.

Action Plan: With the assistance of all stakeholders,

1. Create, maintain, update and publish a database of local and community based resources and contact information in case a need may arise.
2. Build, maintain and publicize a catalog of presentations, trainings and resource materials on topics dealing with mental health.
3. Video tape (where appropriate) and maintain a library of resources and presentations and share with applicable parties.
4. Communicate with the community the progress of the implementation of the Society for Teen Suicide Prevention (STSP) Lifelines' comprehensive prevention, intervention and post-vention program through communication methods deemed appropriate.

Goal 2: Collaboration in Addressing Youth Mental Health Awareness: Develop a coordinated roadmap for parents, students and school community stakeholders to address youth mental health and wellness concerns.

Action Plan: With the assistance of all stakeholders,

1. Collaborate with the Society for Teen Suicide Prevention (STSP) for the implementation of the Lifelines comprehensive program.
2. Develop a comprehensive system for school collaboration with local, county and state agencies.
3. Develop a comprehensive outreach system for parents/guardians.
4. Develop a school and community events schedule for health and wellness activities.
5. Conduct parent/community informational workshops with school, local, county and state agencies.

Goal 3: Consistency in Addressing Youth Mental Health Awareness: Use common language and coordinated actions to promote the importance of youth mental health and wellness awareness and acceptance throughout the school community and with its stakeholders.

Action Plan: With the assistance of all stakeholders,

1. Plan and implement the Lifelines comprehensive program in all district schools.
2. Establish and utilize a common language concerning mental health awareness and acceptance in order to reduce the uncertainty and stigma often associated with its complex issues.
3. Utilize community and stakeholders' resources to plan age appropriate school programs and assemblies.
4. Publicize and post community resources that are available to families in addressing mental health awareness.



Lessons Learned

Lesson #1 – Ocean City School District’s Framework: Consistency, Collaboration & Communication

Lesson #2 – C.O.R.E.

Lesson #3 – Checklist

Lesson #4 – Reestablish, Reconnect, Reassess



Lesson #1: *Ocean City School District Framework: Consistency, Collaboration & Communication*

- Identify and define the components of a comprehensive, whole-school approach to Youth Mental Health and Wellness strategies aimed at communication, collaboration and consistency within the School District and with our Community Partners.
- Ocean City School Board's Policy #5350: Student Suicide Prevention
- OCSD Framework: Consistency, Collaboration & Communication
- Youth Mental Health & Wellness
- NJSBA: 3-D Strategic Planning for Student Support Services



Lesson #2: C.O.R.E.

C – Connect

Families:

- Families in distress need to be met where they are comfortable – that might not be in school.
- Collaborate with parents and families as interventions are more effective when parents participate.
- Understand the family's unique situation and culture, including understanding how they view schools and the family's role with schools.
- Focus on the family's strengths, not just the problems. If you observe behaviors that make you think they are uneasy, ask – don't ignore non-verbal behaviors.
- Use events, such as back-to-school nights, PTA meetings, when parents are present to share information with them.
- Send resource materials that can be carried in a wallet or hung on the refrigerator door.
- Present suicide prevention information at PTA or other parent organization meetings.

Bring people together to start planning process

- Have the right people in the room
- Engage with administration, school boards and other key stakeholders
- Engage school staff (chart school staff responsibilities)
- Engage community partners
- Connect with them by providing them with basic information about youth suicide and suicide prevention

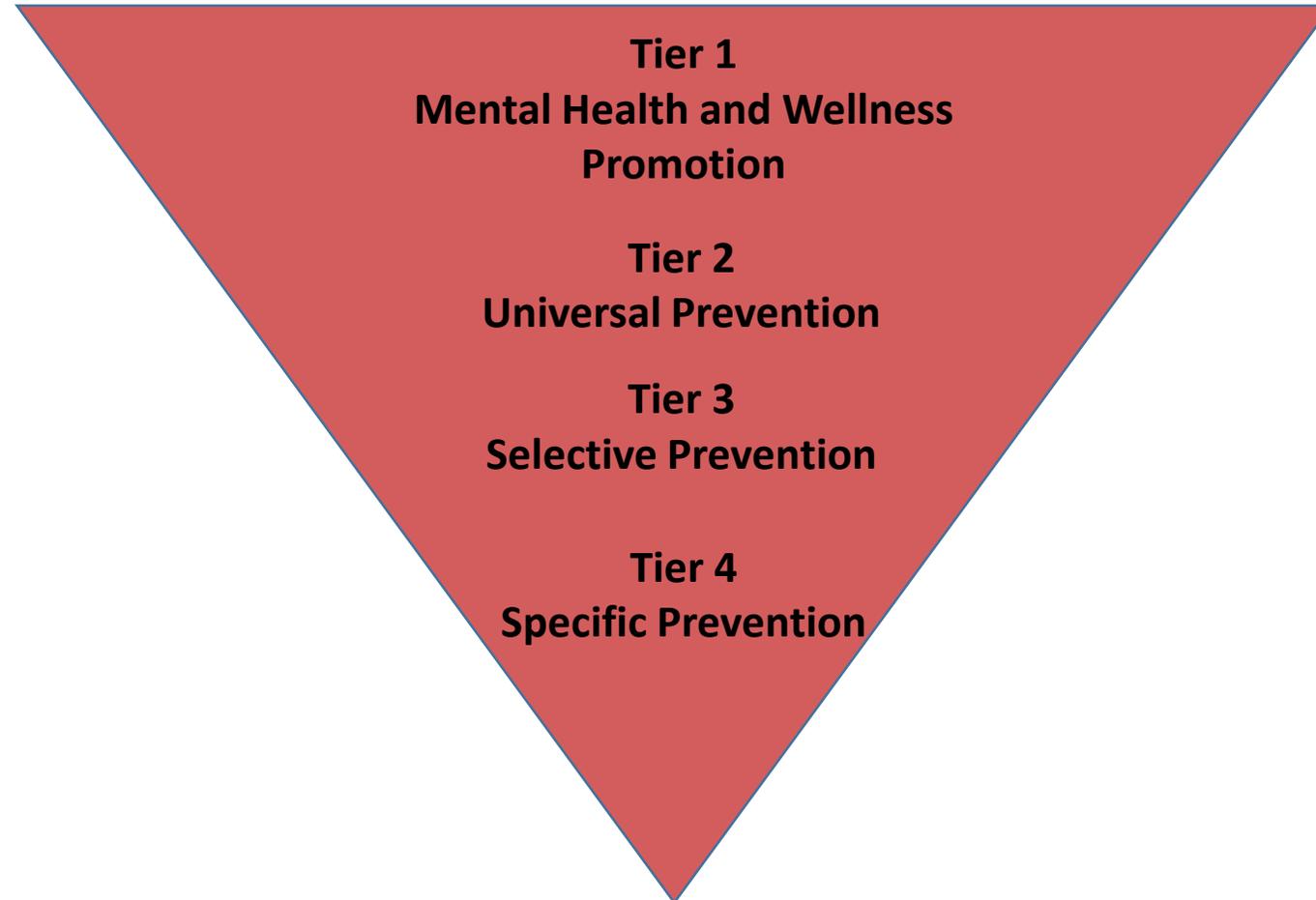
Other Districts

NJSBA



C.O.R.E.

O – Overall Strategy (Multi-tiered System of Supports)



Tier 1 – Mental Health and Wellness

- This Tier is aimed at an overall positive mental health and wellness strategies by building strengths, competencies, resiliency, and resources.
- Promote resiliency, positive behavior and safety, will developing a supportive school environment. This Tier employs whole-school approaches, such as positive behavior interventions and supports, social-emotional support activities, and a universal screening for depression and at-risk behaviors.
- This Tier is for all students and for all staff.
- For example: Friday with Friends, CPR, Clubs (SCAT, SADD), Play Challenge, Raider-THON, “Walks”, Trainings, After-Prom night



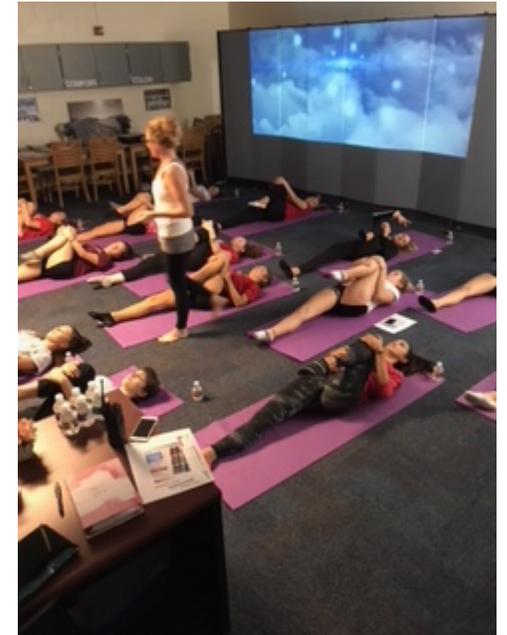
Wellness Center Information

- Our Ocean City School District strives to address our students' social, physical and mental health as well as to ensure that their overall wellness is positive and healthy.
- We have made a commitment to enrich and nourish our School District as a community, as well as focusing on improving wellness awareness in students and staff.
- By collaborating with our partners in our community as well (i.e. Ed. Foundation) we have been able to provide a safe, confidential area for our students which has proven to better our school climate



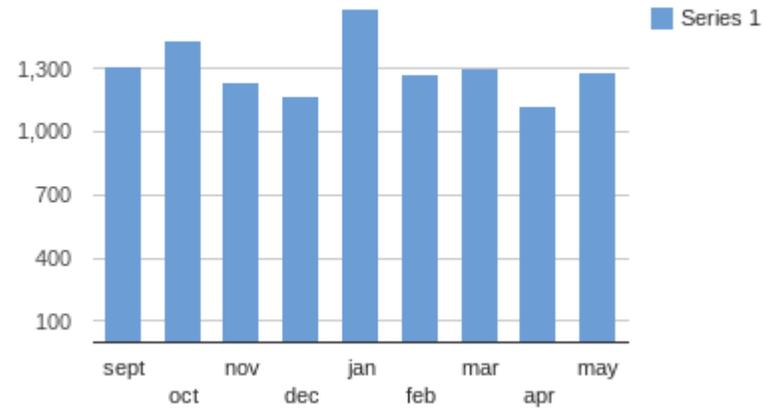
High School Wellness Center

- Grades 9-12
- Wellness Center opened 2017/2018
- 11,729 visits in 2018/2019
- All 9th graders visit by end of September
- Open-door policy, referrals from staff or parents
- "Check-ins", groups, clubs, etc.
- Decrease in mental health homebound

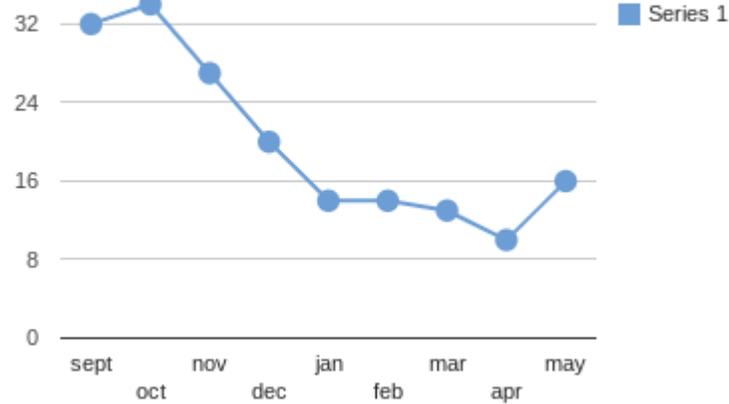


What do the numbers tell us?

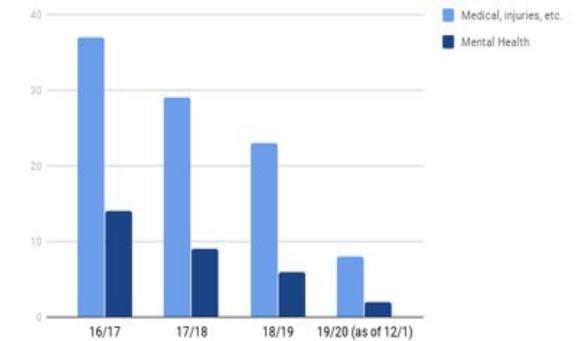
Student Visits to Wellness Center



Average Time Spent in Wellness Center



Homebound Numbers



Intermediate School Wellness Center

Who?

- All Students
- Grades 4-8
- Open Door Policy

When?

- 47.6% Lunch
- 8.1% Recess
- 7.7% Math
- 7.7% Language Arts

What?

- 1:1 Sessions
- Groups
- Gilda's Club
- Presentations
- Dog Therapy
- Collaborations
- Lunches

Why?

- Anxiety
- Need quiet space
- Peer Relationships
- Family Concerns

How?

- 62.4% Self-Referred
- 9% Teachers
- 8.3% Guidance



Tier 2 – Universal Prevention

- This Tier is aimed at universal prevention programs or activities that are geared towards every student.
- Implement a comprehensive wellness program that works to use peer leaders to help establish a positive school culture, change norms of keeping silent, increase help-seeking behaviors, and make connections between students and caring adults.
- Society for Teen Suicide Prevention – Lifelines Program
- This Tier is for all students and for all support services staff and other staff who fulfill this capacity.
- For example: Mental Health First Aid, Parent Nights, DYK, Olweus, Pause Before You Post, Passive Breath Alcohol Sensor Device – dance



Tier 3 – Selective Prevention

- This Tier is aimed at students who have been identified as having risk factors and/or being at risk.
- Identify specific problems at the school or classroom level and use mental health professionals to assess students for and guide these interventions.
- This Tier is for at-risk students and for more selective support services staff and mental health professionals.
- Groups in which they can learn and practice life skills, such as problem-solving and coping skills
- Specialized services or support, such as a social worker with mental health counseling, Student Assistance Counselor
- For example: Social Worker-Mental Health Counselor, Cape Counseling, Student Assistance Coordinator



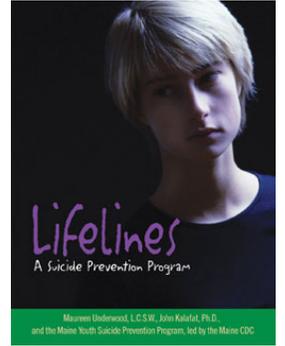
Tier 4 – Specific Prevention

- This Tier is aimed at students who have been identified as high risk as they have exhibited signs, symptoms of suicide and/or have demonstrated suicide behaviors.
- Student support staff teams that identify, follow and refer at-risk students for needed services (all throughout their time in the district)
- This Tier is for students with severe and/or chronic problems and for a few of support services staff and mental health professionals.
- For example: Therapeutic Interventions, County & State Agencies



C.O.R.E.

R – Resources



- *Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program*
- [2017 Youth Suicide Report](#) (NJ Department of Children & Families)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (Risk factors and Warring Signs)
- [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)
- Place resources in one place on the website; makes it easy to access



C.O.R.E.

E – Educate/Evaluate

- District's guidelines and policies
- Educate a Gatekeeper(s)
- Suicide Prevention and Education for ALL school personnel
- Educate staff & students
- Integrate comprehensive school-based suicide program
- Evaluate district guidelines, policies and programs & impact



Lesson #3: *Checklist*

- Provides districts with an efficient inventory of what research and practices suggest as important considerations
- Use the checklist to quickly evaluate what services and policies your district has in place and what your district needs
- This checklist is not a definitive declaration for what each district should do
- To be used as a starting point for each district to create, implement their own version of what works for them
- Reschedule any immediate stressful academic exercises or tests if possible, however, avoid changing the school day's regular schedule



Lesson #4: *Reestablish, Reconnect, Reassess*

- Trauma doesn't go away, even when students look like they are functioning.
- Provide long-term surveillance.
- Interventions that involve re-living, re-working or re-collecting trauma events in a group may cause harm.
- Work to re-establish a healthy school climate. Be sensitive to stigma around issues of suicide, help-seeking and mental health. Think about 1st day back to school. Also, give thought to support measures during the summer months.
- Reconnect with staff & community partners to determine if the approach is working in terms of community & staff mental health education.
- Reassess guidelines, policies and prevention programs should be bi-annually revisited for consistency and relevancy.
- Reach out to other School Districts to support them when they go through a crisis. No one should stand alone when dealing with a crisis – it takes a Village!



Contact Information

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