



Methodology

- 60 student responses:
 - Questions where open ended
 - Student responses were written verbatim
 - Inductive content analysis:
utilizes the process of abstraction to reduce and group data so that researchers can answer the study questions using concepts, categories or themes



Demographics

The known students (those who did not respond anonymously) represent 15 schools, including two schools located within a Montana Tribal Nation.

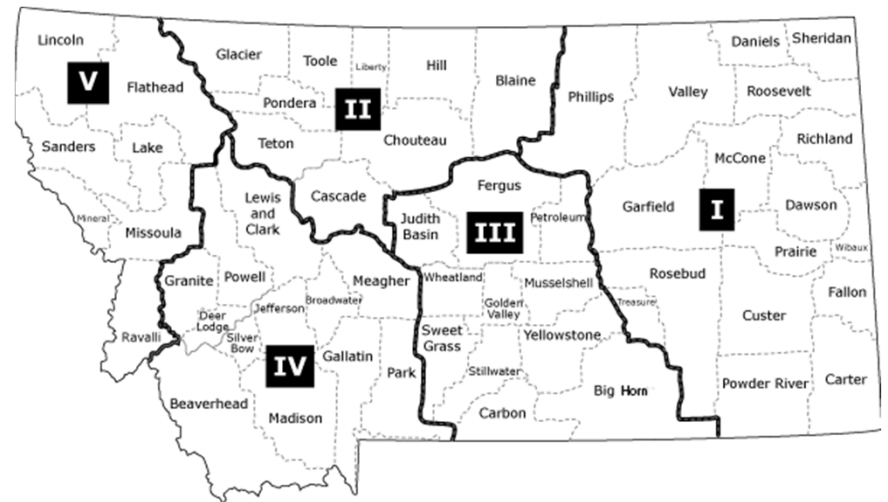
- AA: 4 schools
- A: 1 school
- B: 1 school
- C: 9 schools



Demographics

The known students (those who did not respond anonymously) represent 15 schools, including two schools located within a Montana Tribal Nation.

- Region 1: 4 schools
- Region 2: 5 schools
- Region 3: 3 schools
- Region 4: 1 school
- Region 5: 2 schools



In what ways
can schools
make
students feel
safe and
welcome at
school?

47 students responded:

- **Supportive staff/positive relationships with staff**
 - 24 students
- **Intentionally welcome *all* students**
 - 9 students
- **Physical space designated for student needs**
 - 7 students
- **Actively respond to needs**
 - 5 students
- **Emotionally safe space**
 - 5 students



In what ways
can schools
make
students feel
safe and
welcome at
school?


Student quotes:

*The teachers. Coaches also. Fun teachers that actually **care about you**. Sometimes teachers **check-in on you** and it makes school better.*

*Create a **safe space where we feel welcome***

*Schools can make students feel safe and welcome by 1st a **comfy welcoming classroom, a warming and comforting vibe, teachers visiting you and learning new things about you** they should know.*

*Having a **safe place** for students to go to **when they need space**.*



In your opinion, what does it mean to have good mental health?

42 students responded:

- **Posses a positive self-image/confidence**
 - 13 students
- **Be able to overcome challenges/cope**
 - 12 students
- **Be able to manage negative thoughts and stress (mental health)**
 - 10 students
- **Be happy/posses a positive outlook**
 - 10 students
- **Have positive relationships with others**
 - 8 students
- **Be able to enjoy activities**
 - 6 students
- **Posses optimism/excitement about the future**
 - 5 students



In your opinion, what does it mean to have good mental health?

Student quotes:

*To me having good health means wanting to do the things **I enjoy and being excited to do things.***

Enjoying little things and being secure in who you are

*You are **happy with yourself** and are **aware of healthy ways to express your emotions.** You have the **ability to say yes/no with confidence,** and you also **know where/how to ask for help if you need it.***

Feeling fabulous as you!!!



What could a school do to help students have good mental health?

60 students responded:

- **Supportive staff/positive relationships with staff**
 - 19 students
- **Educate students and staff on mental health**
 - 14 students
- **Provide mental health supports**
 - 14 students
- **Work to reduce academic stress/pressure**
 - 9 students
- **Intentionally welcome all students**
 - 8 students
- **Provide a physical space dedicated to student needs**
 - 7 students
- **Teach strategies to support mental health**
 - 7 students
- **Provide more breaks**
 - 6 students



What could a school do to help students have good mental health?

Student quotes:

*Schools can help students have better mental health by providing a **welcoming environment**.*

Being there for them, checking up on them if they don't look happy

Allow teachers to be able to express when they are having bad days to encourage students to do the same

I think we need to start talking about it and having students aware of the National Suicide Hotline and that the number has changed to 988.



What kind of student wellness and/or mental health supports do you think Montana students need more of?

41 students responded:

- **Supportive staff/positive relationships with staff**
 - 12 students
- **Provide mental health supports**
 - 7 students
- **Acceptance/destigmatize mental illness**
 - 6 students
- **Provide breaks**
 - 6 students
- **Provide a physical space dedicated to student needs**
 - 5 students
- **Intentionally welcome/support all students**
 - 4 students
- **Work to decrease academic stress/pressure**
 - 4 students

What kind of student wellness and/or mental health supports do you think Montana students need more of?

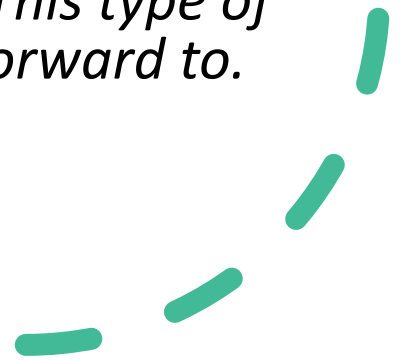
Student quotes:

The ability to feel comfortable enough to reach out for help.

People you can talk to about problems that won't tell no one and make you feel comfortable and safe

Set time aside from the school day or during the week that is not related to school work like a reset button for ourselves. This type of thing gives us something to look forward to.

a quiet space for them to relax



Top strategies across questions:

Across the questions dedicated towards identifying tangible school strategies, **seven** main themes appeared as the top strategies a school may want to consider to strengthen student mental health, wellness, and feelings of safety at school.

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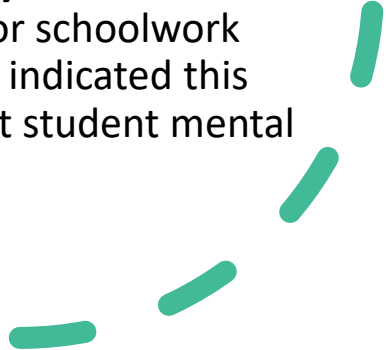
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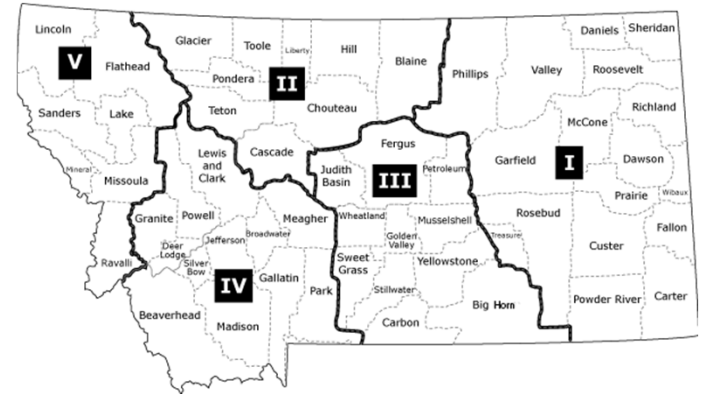
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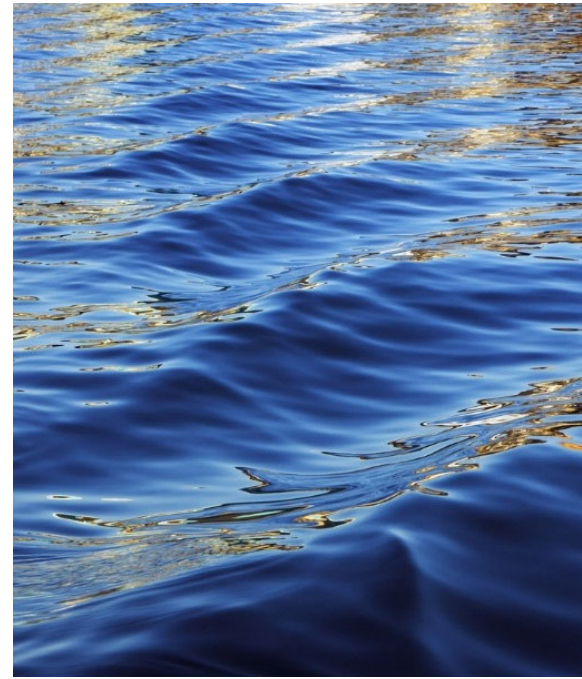
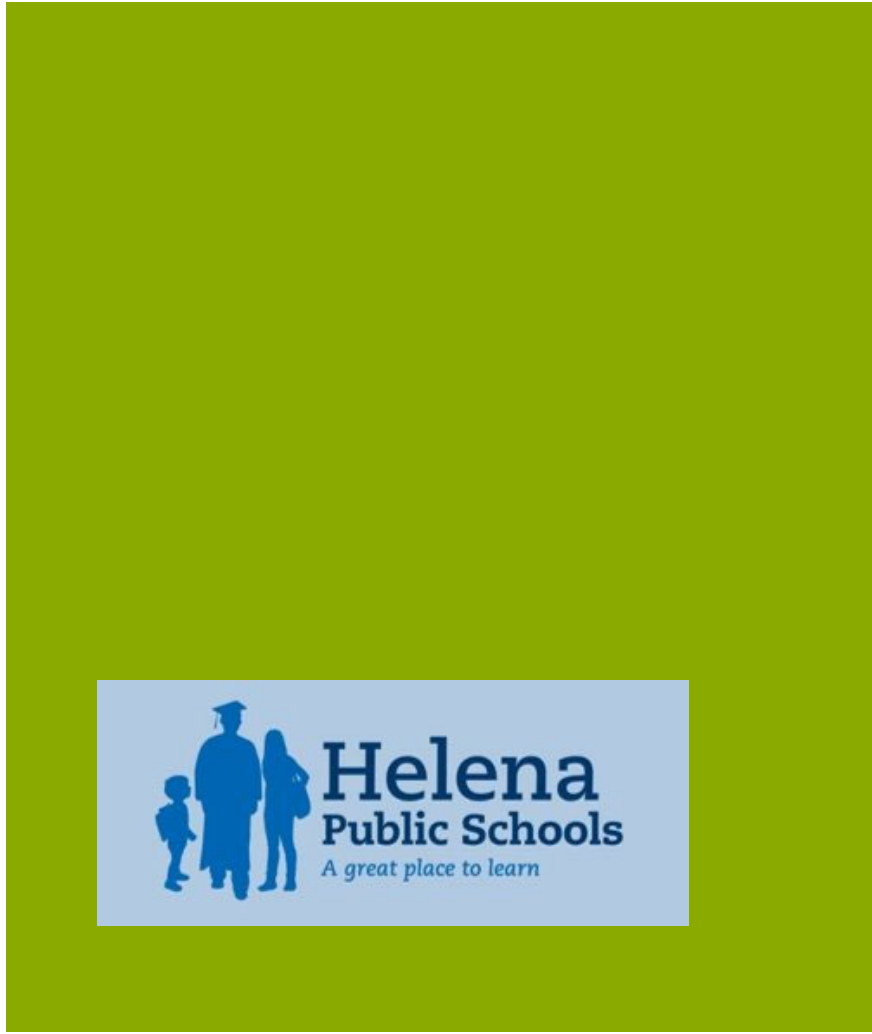
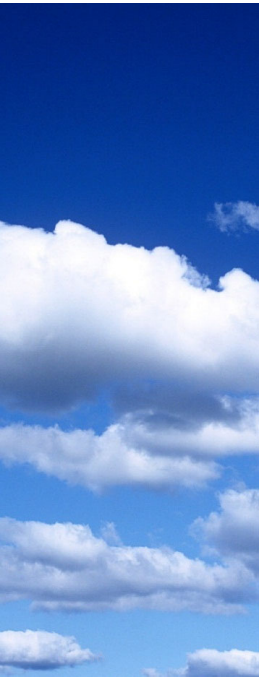
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7. Provide additional breaks throughout the day: The recommendation to provide additional breaks for schoolwork appeared in the **12** student responses. Students indicated this would be a helpful strategy for school to support student mental health and a support students need more of.



Statewide findings: One district's response





Our district:

- 7676 students
- 2 traditional high schools
- 1 alternative program
- 2 middle schools
- 11 elementary schools



SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS MODEL



ENGAGEMENT

Relationships

Respect for Diversity

School Participation

SAFETY

Emotional Safety

Physical Safety

Bullying/Cyberbullying

Substance Use

Emergency Readiness/Management

ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

Instructional Environment

Physical Health

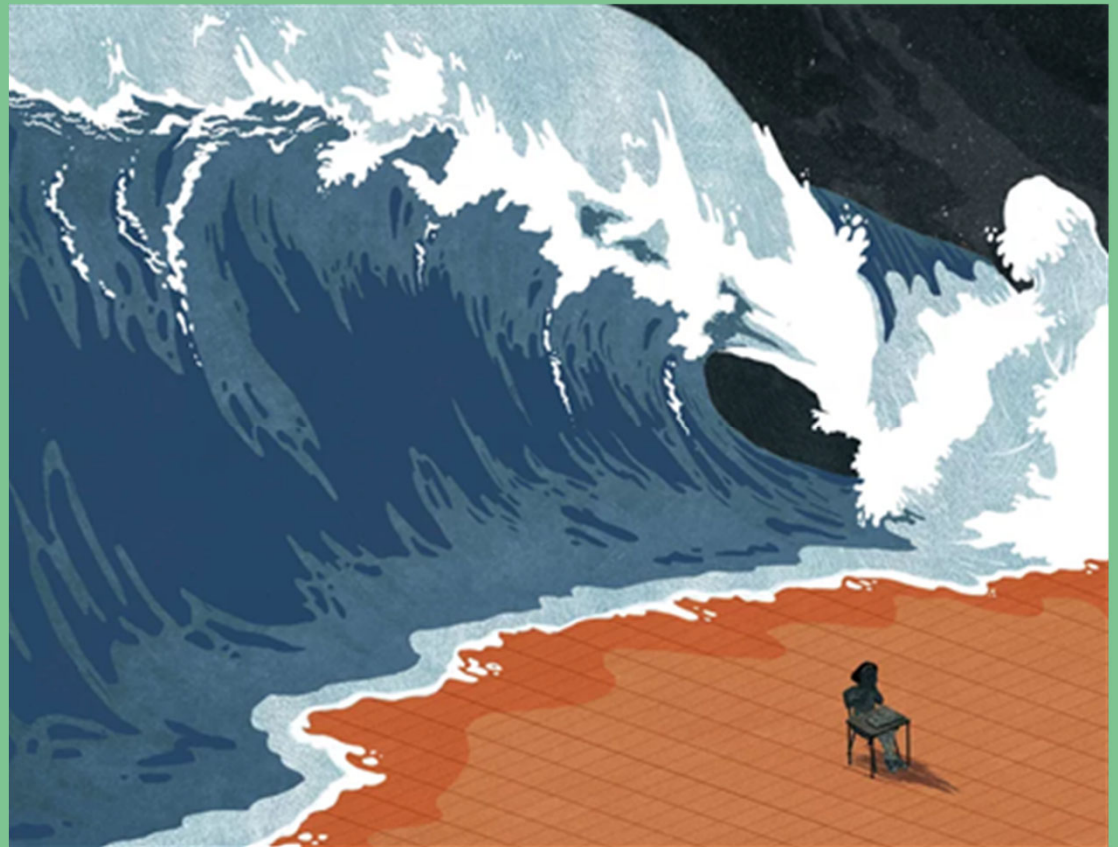
Mental Health

Disciplinary Environment

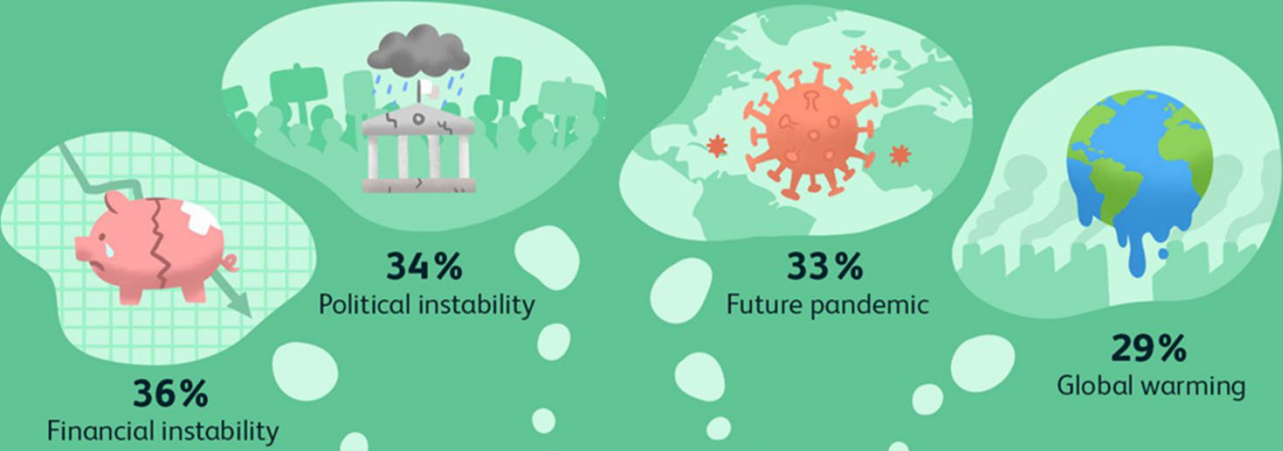
School safety starts with mental health



Post-Pandemic:
our new normal for
kids, and staff



The Top 4 Concerns About the Future Are...



MENTAL HEALTH, STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Mental health disorders are not unique to adults. Children are just as prone.

About **1 IN 2** children develop a mental illness by the age of 14.

8% of youth have an anxiety disorder.



Suicide is the leading cause of death in youth ages **10-24**.

37% of students with a mental health condition age 14 and older drop out of school—the highest dropout rate of any disability group.

70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.

The average delay between onset of symptoms and intervention is **8-10 YEARS**.

Approximately **32,000** children are in Department of Family Protective Services conservatorship, and it is estimated that over **50%** of those children have a diagnosed mental illness in the U.S.

50%

of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and

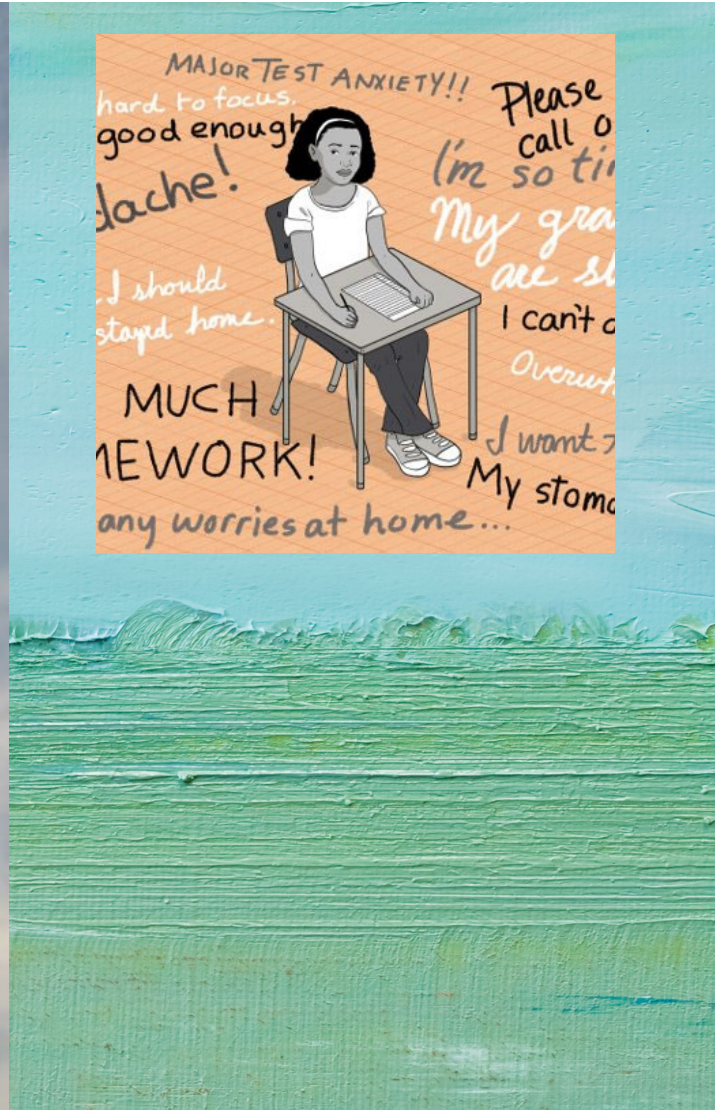
75%


by age 24.

“

We learn in a state of positive emotion much more effectively than we can learn in a state of negative emotion. That has huge implications for what we do in schools.

—DR. LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND





"Everything you do is graded and judged and it's overwhelming"

"I wish adults knew that it does take a lot of motivation to get up and go to school."

"Schools can make students feel safe by being human, knowing that we are not robots and be okay with creative minds doing things differently if productive."

How are our students doing?

"Teachers should talk about mental health more and not treat it like such a touchy subject, just open up and talk about it. Asking "How are you doing today?" or "I hope you have a good day." just little things like that can really go a long way."

"It's harder to excel when we are only being recognized as a student and nothing else."

▼
The Behavioral and Emotional Risk Index (BASC-BESS) was administered districtwide in October 2022.

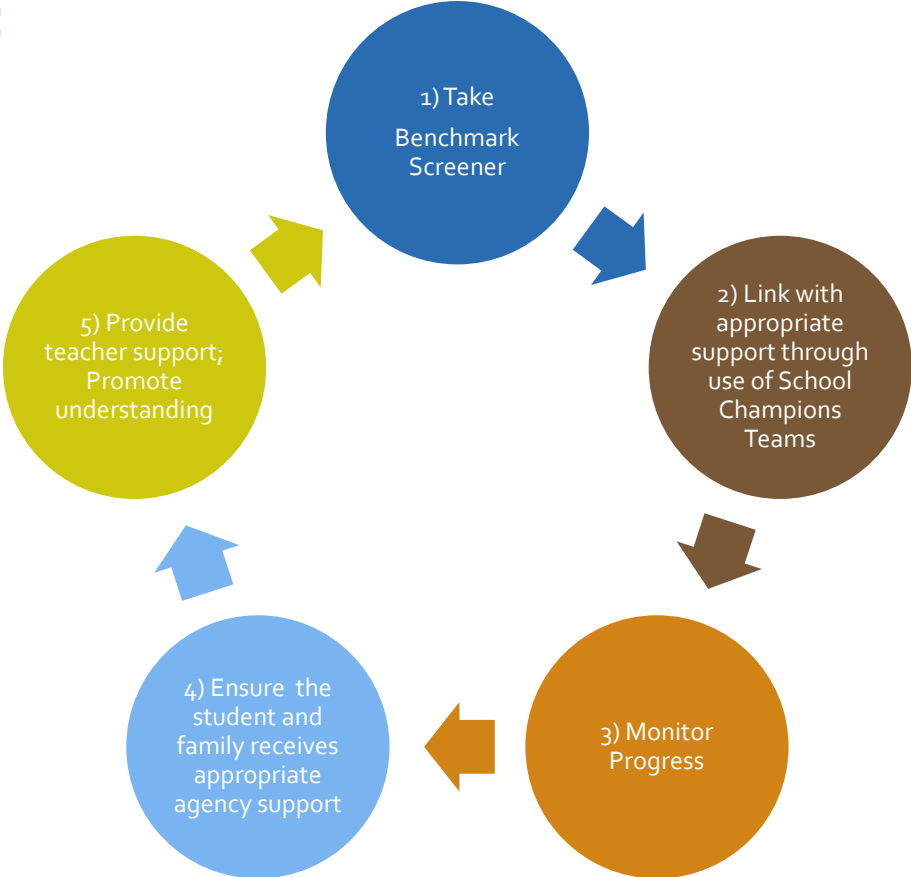
The results were sobering.

Ten percent (156 students) of our K-2 students were identified as having an “Extremely Elevated Risk” of behavioral and emotional risk, with an additional 15% (235 students) identified as having an “Elevated Risk” for a total of 391 district K-2nd graders.

Completing the survey themselves, 9% (445 students) of 3rd through 12th grade students rated themselves as being in the “Extremely Elevated Risk” of behavioral and emotional risk, with an additional 17% (854 students) rating themselves as having an “Elevated Risk” for a total of 1,299 district 3rd – 12th graders.

Our internal screening tools indicate that approximately one in four youth have an elevated risk for anxiety and/or depression.

Spring of 2023, 6-12th graders shifted to the Rural Behavioral Health Initiative (RBHI) Mental Health Screenings Linked to Care:



Middle Schools Spring 2023 RBHI data

14-18% of students reported previous or current Suicidality

9 -12% of students report Clinically Significant Depressive Symptoms

9 – 12% of students report Clinically Significant Anxiety Symptoms

High Schools Spring 2023 RBHI data

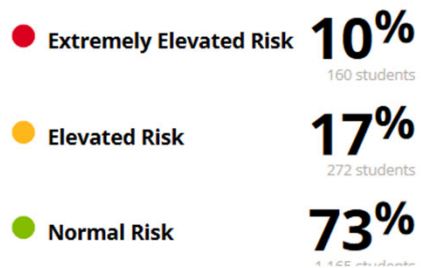
14-18% of students reported previous or current Suicidality

8-9% of students report Clinically Significant Depressive Symptoms

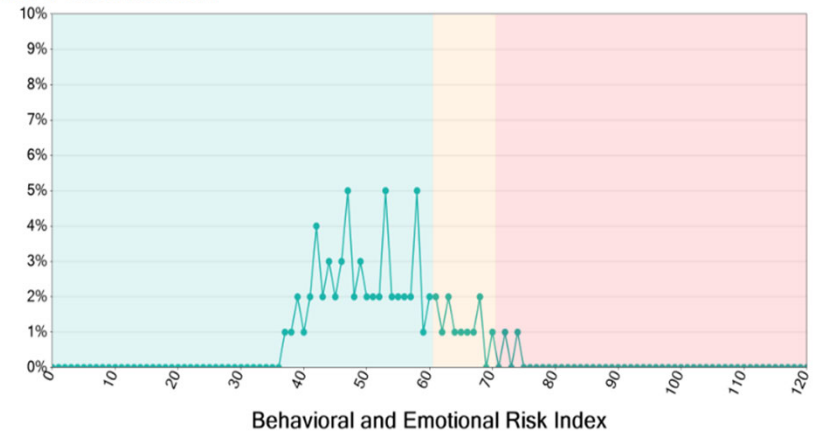
7 – 9% of students report Clinically Significant Anxiety Symptoms

Elementary Schools: Spring 2023 BASC-BESS data

Behavioral and Emotional Risk Index BESS-3 (Student)



Score Distribution



Resiliency
programs
currently in
our schools:
K-12

- **CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE** - Kindergarten – 12th grades; Conscious Discipline is based on brain research and is a social emotional learning program that emphasizes adults modeling behavior and problem-solving during student behavioral episode that teaches the student skills that assist in self-control and self-regulation.

Resiliency
programs
currently in
our schools:
K-5

- **BASC-BESS (Behavioral & Emotional Screening System)** - Kindergarten – 5th grades; given in October and February.
- **Second Step Lessons** – Kindergarten – 5th grades. The skills with Second Step are focused on empathy, emotion management, friendship and problem solving.
- **PAX GBG (PeaceBuilders Good Behavior Game)** - Kindergarten – 5th grades. The PAX GBG is an evidence-based, best practice, universal preventative intervention applied by teacher in the classroom. Students learn self-management (self-regulation) skills while collaborating to make their classroom a peaceful and productive learning environment. The PAX GBG was not designed to be a suicide prevention program, but studies have shown students who learned the PAX GBG are significantly less likely to have experienced suicidal ideation.

Resiliency programs currently in our schools: 6-12

- **SOS (Signs of Suicide)** – SOS is designed to teach students how to recognize the signs of suicide and mental health struggles in themselves or peers and to encourage students to reach out for help. Students learned ACT (Acknowledge, Care, Tell). (7th grade)
- **YAMH (Youth Aware of Mental Health)** – Freshman year program run through the Frosh PE courses. Five lessons are presented by outside mental health professionals.
- **QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer)** – Sophomore program run through the Health classes by health teachers. The focus of this program is for students to learn how to engage with a classmate who may be having suicidal thoughts and to understand the importance of asking for help from an adult if they feel their friend is at risk.

NEW
Resiliency
programs
currently in
our schools:
6-12

- **KIDS IN THE CORNER** reduces the stigma that surrounds mental illness and to support the kid in the corner, through the "Penny Pledge" training. (6th grade)
- **IT'S REAL: Teens and Mental Health (AFSP)** raises awareness about mental health issues, how to start a conversation about mental health, the importance of self-care, and how to reach out for help. (8th grade)
- **SOS (Sources of Strength)** is a best practice youth suicide prevention project designed to harness the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, bullying, and substance abuse. (11th grade)
- **IT'S REAL: College & Career- Students and Mental Health (AFSP)** is designed to raise awareness about mental health issues commonly experienced by students as they transition out of high school into post-graduate college or work. (12th grade)

Staff Mental Health Training Survey

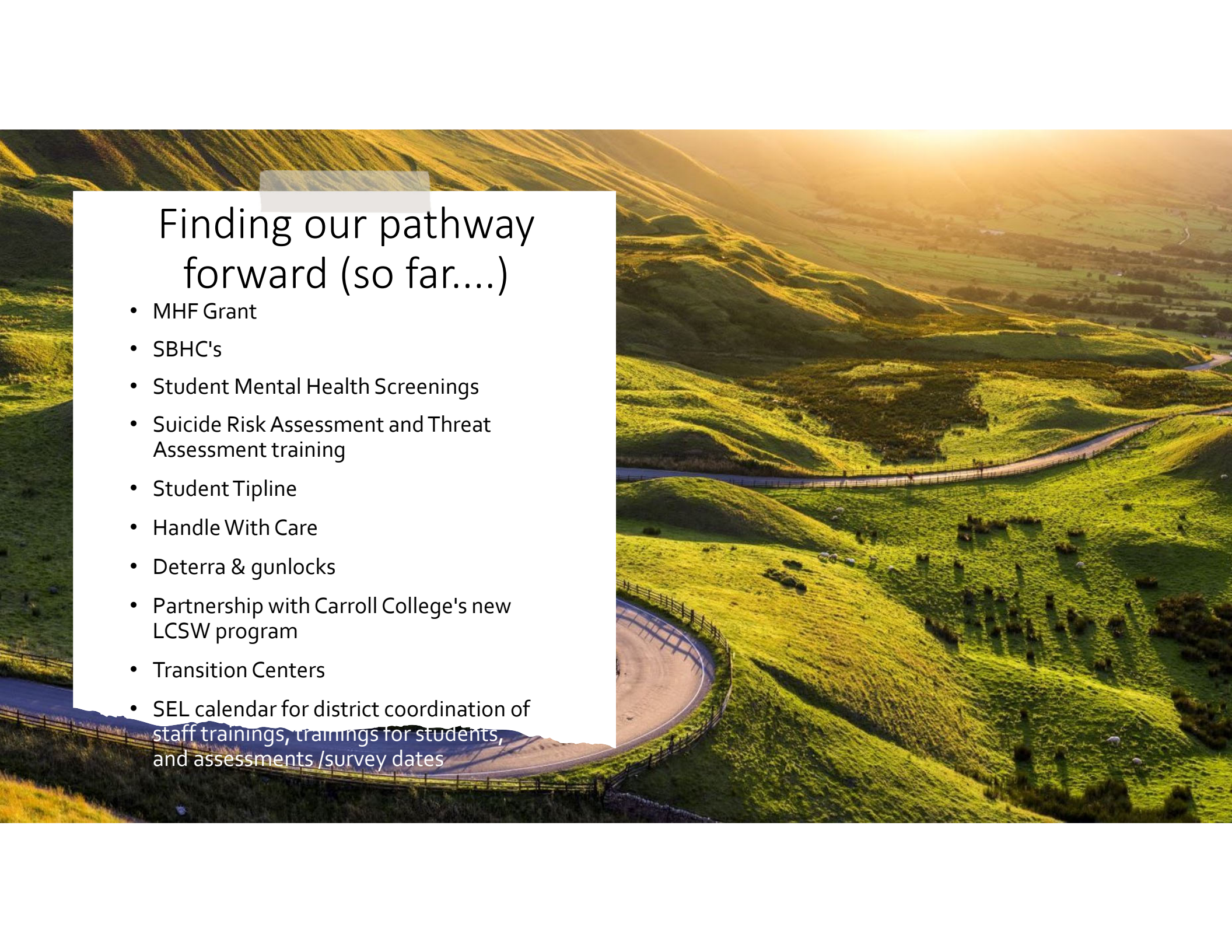
- Trauma Informed Practices Training (84.3%)
- Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training (45.5%)
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention (34.1%)



A hand is shown placing a white puzzle piece into a blue background. The puzzle piece is being inserted into a gap in a larger white puzzle piece. The background is a solid blue color. The puzzle pieces are white with interlocking edges. The hand is on the left side of the image, with the index finger pointing towards the puzzle piece.

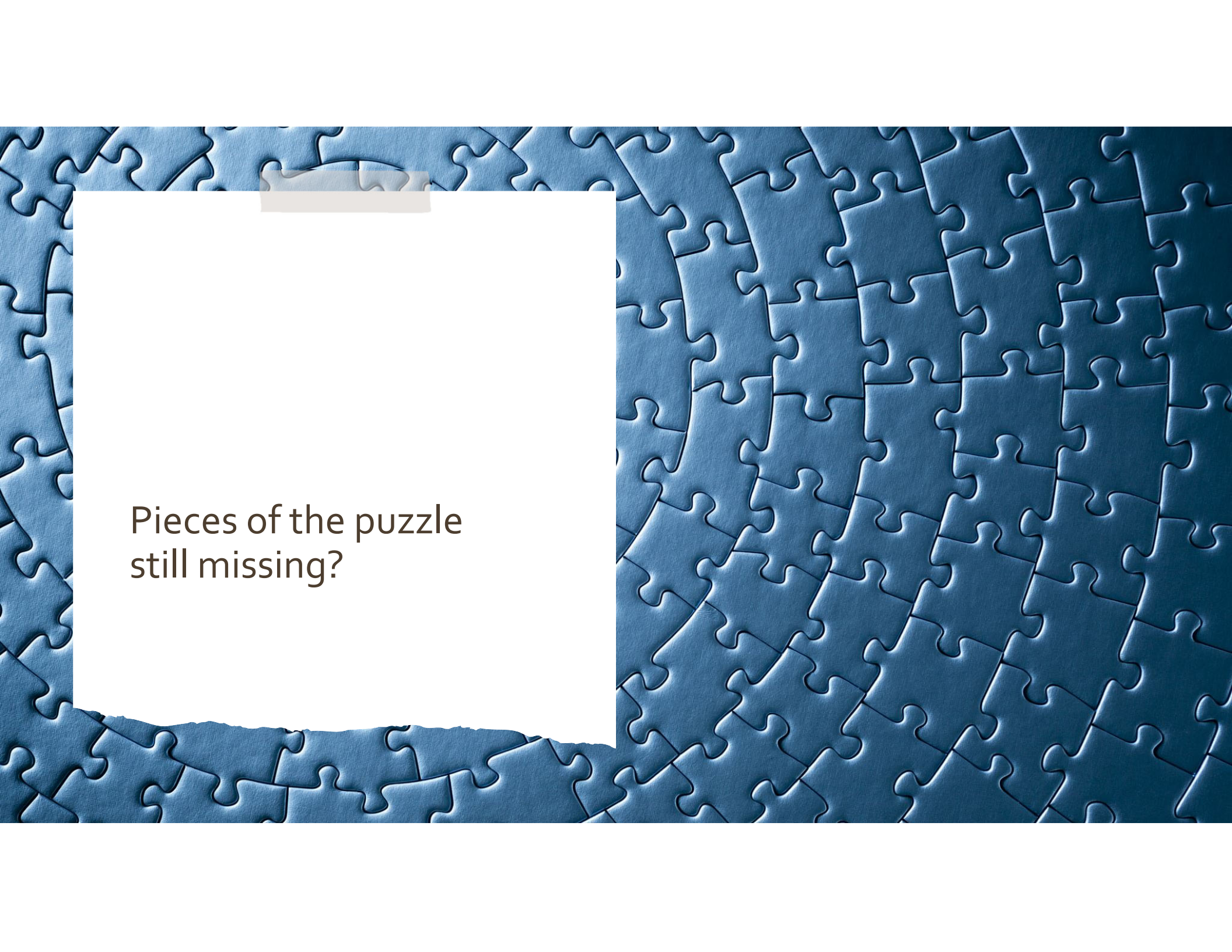
New Professional Development:

- **Trauma Informed Practices**
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid**
- **Suicide Risk Assessment**
- **Suicide Safe Care Tools**
- **MTSS-B Training through the Stronger Together Grant Opportunity**



Finding our pathway forward (so far....)

- MHF Grant
- SBHC's
- Student Mental Health Screenings
- Suicide Risk Assessment and Threat Assessment training
- Student Tipline
- Handle With Care
- Detera & gunlocks
- Partnership with Carroll College's new LCSW program
- Transition Centers
- SEL calendar for district coordination of staff trainings, trainings for students, and assessments /survey dates

The image features a background of interlocking puzzle pieces in a dark blue color. A large white rectangular area is positioned on the left side, with a small, light-colored rectangular tab protruding from its top edge. Inside the white area, the text "Pieces of the puzzle still missing?" is written in a dark, sans-serif font.

Pieces of the puzzle
still missing?



Grants

AWARE
MHAT
Stronger Together
FSCS

Needs:

- Mental health practitioners serving students in need at all 16 school sites.
- Case manager(s) to coordinate services for students and provide technical support for families.



Needs:


- School Based Behaviorists to support students in general education settings
- Transportation (uber-type service) for student health appointments not available in school settings.



Needs:

- Family outreach with learning opportunities to strengthen family systems.
- Mental & Physical Health Student Advisory Board
- Partner/District Advisory Board





How will we know
if we are helping
our students?

- BASC-BESS - K-5 given in the late fall, early spring
- RBHI - 6-12 given in the late fall, early spring with link to care
- YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) - given odd years to 8th, 10th & 12th
- PNA (Prevention Needs Assessment) - given even years to 8th, 10th & 12th
- Panorama Surveys (3rd-12th grade students, parents and staff)
- Numbers of Suicide/Threat protocols administered

Low Hanging
Fruit =
Simple changes
in how we
approach our
students that
create
incremental,
compounded
positive
outcomes over
time.



Top strategies across questions:

Across the questions dedicated towards identifying tangible school strategies, **seven** main themes appeared as the top strategies a school may want to consider to strengthen student mental health, wellness, and feelings of safety at school.

1. Encourage staff to support students and foster positive relationships with students: This recommendation from students appears **55** times in students' responses, far surpassing any other thematic response outcome.

2/3. Create a school environment that intentionally welcomes and supports all students: This recommendation appeared **21** times across the three questions asked.

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4. Provide a physical space within the school that is dedicated to student needs: The recommendation that schools provide a space dedicated to students to meet various needs appeared in **19** student responses.



This Photo by Unknown author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#).

How staff can support and foster positive relationships with students:

- Know all of your students' names, and use them when you talk to them
- Learn one thing about students to make a connection
- Make time for small talk
- Lean in when they are most difficult

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What does a school environment that intentionally welcomes and supports all students look like?

-
- Greet them, whenever they show up... even if it's the next day
 - Tell them you missed them (but you have to mean it)
 - Ask if they had breakfast, or need a snack, if they are doing ok
 - Let their parent/guardian know how much you enjoy having their student/family as part of your school family



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In-school mental health supports:

- Have that awkward conversation, it's ok – you don't have to be perfect
- Let them know you care
- Refer as appropriate
- Keep checking in
- Offer flexibility in expectations

Top strategies across questions:

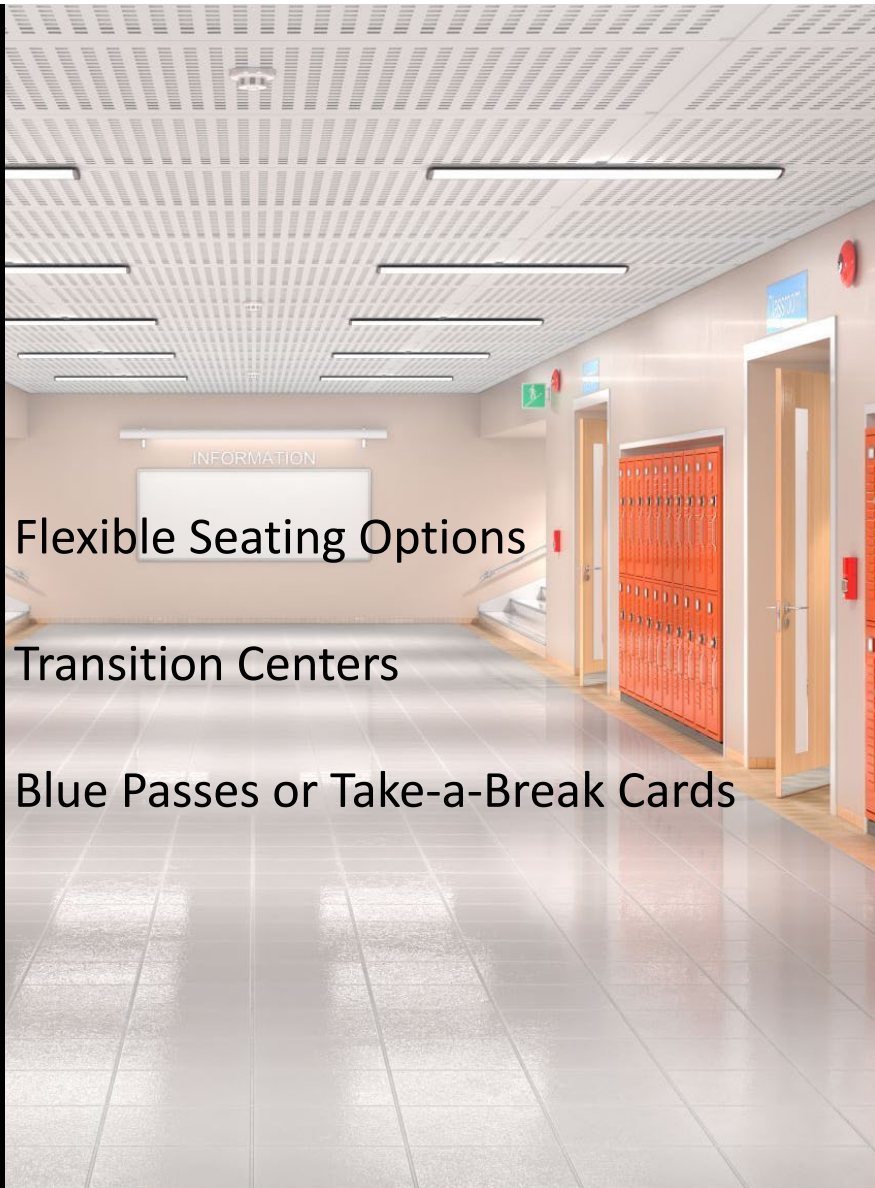
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Flexible Seating Options

Transition Centers

Blue Passes or Take-a-Break Cards


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Mental Health learning opportunities for all students and staff:

Student and Staff trainings are very important! But isn't the only piece to creating an overarching community of care:

- **Daily reinforcement, "How we treat each other..."**.
- **Restorative practices, "I'm sorry for..."**.
- **Create a caring culture and talk about it often, "We are a part of a school family... we do because.. we don't, instead..."**.
- **Important telling**
- **"You must like hanging out with me", "Just letting you know I care"**
- **Who is on your ticker-list and who is dedicated to checking in?**
- **Finding the positive and saying it out loud**

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A concrete sidewalk is shown with colorful chalk drawings. At the top, a rainbow is drawn. Below it, the words "GROW UP" are written in large, colorful letters. The sidewalk is flanked by green grass on both sides.

Reducing stress and pressure over academic performance:

There was a 380% increase in suicidal ideation for students receiving "D's" compared to "A's" in their studies. (2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey)

Shifting from traditional practices to fluid processes with high expectations:

- It is ok to fail; it builds resilience & it's why we are here
- Proficiency based grading
- Focus on the Whole Child – even when they are taller than you

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Additional breaks during the day to support mental health:

- PAX GBG – builds self-regulation, reinforces positive behaviors, supports development of self-agency and command to delay gratification and reduce impulsivity
- Green Breaks – improves focus, attention, refresh moods
- Read to them (it's not just for elementary) - improves concentration, language acquisition, problem solving, helps kids calm down and focus
- Play background music – reduces anxiety, improves mood, mental alertness and memory, increases creativity, provides the brain time to organize and re-set
- Stop and have a conversation



Last note:

Partners are available and want to help:

- NAMI-MT
- OPI
- DPHHS
- MHF
- RBHI
- L&C Public Health Departments
- Federally Qualified Health Clinics
- Local mental health agencies
- Local Non-Profits
- PAXIS
- CTCC
- AFSP

We need to find a way forward together:

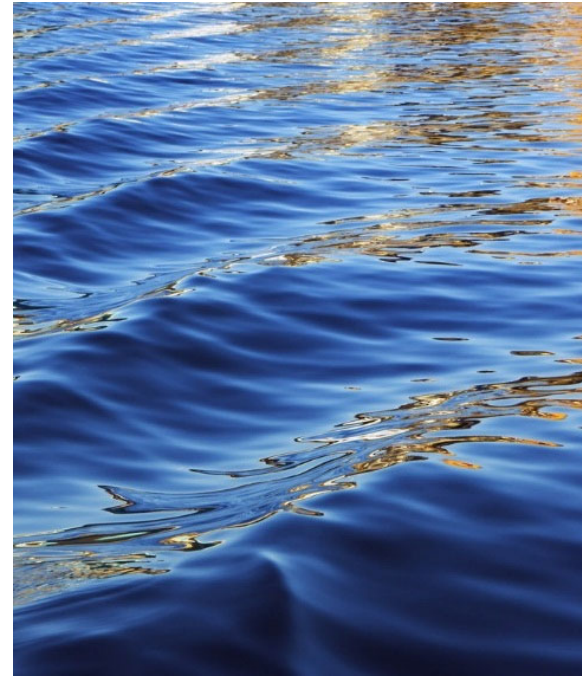
- Establish a sustainable State funding source for School Based Mental Health services
- Ability to bill for behavioral health intervention services for all students

Providing school based mental health services is critical in keeping our kids, staff and community safe.



Thank you!

Questions?



PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION

Reach out!

- Lona Carter, Student Health, Helena Public Schools
 - lcarter1@helenaschools.org or 406-324-2417
- Michele Henson, School Safety Program Manger, OPI
 - michele.henson@mt.gov or 406-595-1058

Please use the QR code and give us your feedback! We value your thoughts and opinions.

