SACRAMENTO COUNTY STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS PLAN

# **CENTERING WELLNESS**

2022



# **Centering Wellness**

Sacramento County

Student Mental Health and Wellness Plan

Developed by:



With support from:





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# Introduction

In late 2021, the Sacramento County Office of Education and Sacramento County Department of Health Services, Behavioral Health Services convened a participatory process to develop a new plan for student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County. The resulting plan establishes a shared vision and values and articulates community-generated priorities and strategies within five pillars. This plan builds on past collaborative efforts and recognizes the need to respond to the rapidly changing context.

In 2009, a small group of community members and organizations came together to discuss a common vision and desired results for the role of schools in promoting the mental health and academic success of students. This work led to a 10-year "<u>Sacramento County Student Mental Health and Wellness Plan: A</u> <u>Framework for Change</u>". This plan guided several collaborative initiatives, including the countywide Bullying Prevention Project, the Safe Zone Squad grant, and the recent partnership between the Sacramento County Office of Education and Sacramento County Health Services to place licensed mental health clinicians in schools. These efforts laid the groundwork for this new plan.

Nearly a decade after the initial plan was developed, efforts to address student mental health and wellness faced an unprecedented hurdle. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified the impact of societal factors that negatively affect student mental health, including stigma, racial discrimination, and inequity. There has been a significant decline in the percentage of students in California reporting positive mental health during the pandemic. In a statewide survey of students, 68% of students rated their pre-pandemic mental wellness at or above 7 on a scale of 1–10. However, only 39% of students rated their mental wellness during the pandemic at or above 7.<sup>1</sup> While overall suicides in the state decreased in 2020, suicide rates increased for youth aged 10-18 and subgroups of youth aged 10-24, including Black, Hispanic, and female youth.<sup>2</sup> In recognition of the acute impact of the pandemic and racial inequality on child and adolescent behavioral health across the nation, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association jointly declared a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the pandemic further stressed the providers and systems working to support mental health for students and their families. Recent community conversations in Sacramento County have identified a renewed need for coordinated efforts to support student mental health and wellness. Specifically, community members identified outstanding gaps related to accessing mental health services, improving school climate, providing mental health education and assistance for families, reducing the stigma of mental health, and supporting education and mental health professionals, among others.<sup>4</sup>

Now, more than ever, the Sacramento community must prioritize student mental health and wellness. A collaborative and coordinated approach to this work will be essential to improve student outcomes and nurture resilient families, schools, and communities.

<sup>2</sup> California Department of Public Health (2021). <u>Suicide in California – Data Trends in 2020, COVID Impact, and</u> <u>Prevention Strategies</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Whitaker, A. and Lopez-Perry, C. (2022). <u>State of Student Mental Wellness California: Report 2022.</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (2021). <u>AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and</u> <u>Adolescent Mental Health</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Appendix C: Discovery Report Summary

#### **Planning Process**

The Sacramento County Office of Education and Sacramento County Department of Health Services, Behavioral Health Services guided a participatory process to develop a new multi-year plan for student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County. The Glen Price Group was engaged to facilitate this planning process, which took place between fall 2021 and spring 2022.

The plan was developed in three key phases: 1) A discovery phase focused on understanding the strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County; 2) A design phase to identify a collective vision and plan for student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County; and 3) A delivery phase to finalize the plan.

The planning process included broad community participation through convenings of the Student Mental Health and Wellness Collaborative, community listening sessions, informational interviews, a community survey, and targeted discussions with students, mental health providers, and other groups. These activities generated community input on current strengths, successes, gaps, challenges, and wishes and specific ideas for strengthening student mental health and wellness in the future. The results of these activities were summarized in a report and directly informed the contents of this plan.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Appendix C: Discovery Report Summary

# **Vision and Values**

#### Vision

Sacramento County has a seamless and responsive system of care that empowers all students to be healthy, resilient, and successful.

#### Values

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion** – All students, especially marginalized and vulnerable students, have access to an inclusive system of support and safe and welcoming environments. Systems work to address social and structural inequities and provide services and spaces that celebrate and respond to the diverse cultures, languages, and experiences of school communities.

**Student and family centered** – Services and supports are designed with the unique needs of students and their families in mind. Students and families are partners in the design and delivery of services, in the creation of positive school climates, and in the development of policies and programs.

**Prevention** – Systems work to identify and address the root causes and factors that contribute to student mental health and wellness challenges and take actions to promote wellness and mitigate issues before they become critical.

**Collaboration** – Systems, service providers, students, families, and other community members coordinate to support student mental health and wellness.

### **Pillars, Priorities, and Strategies**

This plan is organized in five interdependent pillars: 1) Schools as Centers of Wellness, 2) Whole Child and Whole Family Approaches, 3) Communication, 4) Responsive Workforce, and 5) Coordinated Systems. These pillars are the foundational and essential components of a comprehensive response to student mental health and wellness. Each pillar contains multiple priorities - the major objectives that the community should achieve to improve outcomes for students. Within each priority are several strategies, which provide specific approaches to address priorities. Together, the pillars, priorities, and strategies provide a framework for the community to collectively make progress towards the vision.



#### 1. Schools as Centers of Wellness

All Sacramento County schools should strive to serve as centers of wellness where all students feel safe and supported and all adults contribute to the mental health and wellness of students. Transforming schools into centers of wellness increases access to mental health resources for all students and their families. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel need to be supported in prioritizing their own mental health and wellness and be equipped with the tools to support positive mental health for all students.



#### Priority 1.A: Increase access to quality mental health services in schools

- I. Expand the school-based clinicians program to serve schools throughout the county, including in rural areas<sup>6</sup>
- II. Ensure services are convenient by offering services both during and outside of the typical school day, in-person (at school, the community or at home) and virtually, and through avenues where students can remain confidential
- III. Support efforts to integrate mental health and wellness throughout regular school activities
- IV. Explore options for incorporating alternative wellness activities (e.g. art-based therapies, yoga, play-based approaches, etc.) into schools based on students' interests and needs
- V. Expand the use of age and developmentally appropriate behavioral health screenings in early learning settings and schools
- VI. Conduct regular community assessments to gauge the needs of students and families, inventory available services, describe strengths and successes, and identify service gaps; update plans to address identified needs

#### Priority 1.B: Expand student-led initiatives and elevate student voice

- I. Regularly solicit input from students to understand their challenges, needs, and recommendations related to student mental health and wellness (see 1.A.V)
- II. Develop and expand peer-support programs where students lead mental health and wellness initiatives (e.g. discussion groups, art-based activities, etc.) with adult supervision and mentorship; train students to serve as peer advocates
- III. Establish youth advisory boards focused on mental health and wellness at the school and district levels to enable student-driven planning and decision making

#### Priority 1.C: Build capacity for educators to support student mental health and wellness

- I. Ensure teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have access to information and resources to address their own mental health and wellness needs (see 2.A.I)
- II. Ensure teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have access to information and resources to connect students with appropriate mental health and wellness services and resources (see 2.A.I)
- III. Provide and incentivize participation in regular training and professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and other school personnel covering topics such as creating safe classroom spaces; culturally responsive pedagogy; sexual orientation, gender

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See <u>https://www.scoe.net/divisions/ed\_services/prevention/mental\_health/</u> for additional information

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identity, and expression (SOGIE) affirming practices; trauma-informed practices; social and emotional learning; restorative justice; wellness and mindfulness practices; and vicarious trauma

#### Priority 1.D: Promote wellness and strengths-based approaches to improve school climate

- I. Prioritize and strengthen efforts to integrate social and emotional learning in schools
- II. Embrace and celebrate multiculturalism as a way to create a sense of belonging and improve self-esteem for all students and school personnel, including marginalized and culturally diverse students and school personnel, by supporting multicultural and multilingual activities, discussions, and events and promoting safe spaces, such as racial or cultural affinity groups
- III. Provide resources, training, and technical assistance to support the use of restorative justice approaches and practices in schools to strengthen conflict reconciliation and prevent and reduce disciplinary actions
- IV. Promote a harm-reduction approach in schools by acknowledging the reality of students' potentially risky and harmful behavior (e.g. substance use and sexual activity). Provide information so students understand the risks associated with their choices and have the tools and strategies to mitigate the potential harms of their own behavior.
- V. Explore school-based strategies to promote healthy and mindful behavior in addition to academic success as a way to reduce hyper-competitive behavior on school campuses that lead to distress and unneeded pressure on students

#### 2. Whole Child and Whole Family Approaches

Families, including extended family members and other caregivers, play an integral role in supporting student mental health and wellness. In order for families to support their students, they must first have what they need for their own mental health and wellness. Therefore, the well-being of students must be considered in relation to the mental health and wellness of families.



# Priority 2.A: Assist students and their families to navigate and access mental health and wellness services

- I. Create, maintain, and promote a centralized inventory of mental health and wellness services that is readily accessible by students, families, educators, and service providers
- II. Establish a navigator program to assist students and families with accessing and enrolling in available services (see 2.C.III and 5.C.III)

#### Priority 2.B: Address the mental health and wellness needs of the whole family

- I. Connect students and families with social services (e.g. food assistance, transportation, etc.) to address their basic needs, with particular attention to the needs of specific household types (e.g. single-parent households, caregiver households, etc.)
- II. Provide families with referrals to culturally and linguistically responsive adult mental health services, with options to receive services in a variety of settings and modalities

#### Priority 2.C: Meaningfully engage families in their student's mental health and wellness

- I. Regularly solicit input from families to understand their challenges, needs, and recommendations related to student mental health and wellness (see 1.A.V)
- II. Provide families with culturally and linguistically responsive guidance and resources on how to best support their children's mental health and wellness
- III. Use navigators to assist families with their child's mental health and wellness challenges and goals and make referrals to available services (see 2.A.II)
- IV. Hold events for families and mental health professionals to meet and build relationships

#### 3. Communication

Supporting student mental health and wellness requires broad community awareness of mental health issues and understanding of available resources. Stigma about mental health issues, which is more prevalent in some cultures, can be a major deterrent to accessing services. Strengthening the whole community's awareness and understanding of student mental health and wellness can help address stigma and increase access.



# Priority 3.A: Promote an understanding of student mental health and wellness, share information, and reduce stigma

- I. Equip students and school personnel with skills and resources to communicate about mental health and wellness with their peers
- II. Conduct assessments and engage in dialogue to understand what the stigmas around mental health and wellness are in different communities, how those stigmas originated, and how they impact whether an individual will seek help
- III. Conduct a culturally, linguistically, and age-appropriate communication campaign, to raise community awareness about student mental health and wellness topics and resources, using trusted messengers
- IV. Hold mental health and wellness informational meetings in various languages open to diverse communities to create space for information sharing and provide opportunities to develop relationships (see 2.C.IV)

#### 4. Responsive Workforce

Sacramento County needs a larger workforce of mental health professionals that are prepared and well-supported to meet the needs of Sacramento County's diverse students and families. Partners throughout the county should work together to build the next generation of mental health professionals, with a particular emphasis on recruiting and preparing culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse individuals that reflect the neighborhoods and communities they will serve. Additionally, the existing mental health workforce must have access to up-to-date information, resources, and training.



#### Priority 4.A: Strengthen the pipeline of diverse mental health professionals

- I. Communicate specifically with underrepresented student groups (e.g. LGBTQ+, people of color, and multilingual students) about the possibilities of careers in the mental health and wellness field
- II. Recruit and train young adults in middle and high school to serve in a variety of positions, including roles such as peer mentor, near-peer mentor, peer support specialist, and family navigator; provide opportunities for students to earn school credit for their service in these roles
- III. Develop a cohesive path to employment in mental health and wellness careers including mentorship and college navigation assistance, financial assistance, training, and paid preapprenticeship or internship opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students
- IV. Conduct targeted recruitment and outreach to linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse communities and SOGIE affirming organizations when hiring for mental health and wellness positions in schools, community-based organizations, and local government

#### Priority 4.B: Provide ongoing professional development and supports for mental health professionals

- I. Provide regular, high-quality, and affordable training and professional development for mental health and wellness professionals that support them to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students and families
- II. Provide high-quality clinical supervision for new mental health and wellness professionals working with students and families

#### 5. Coordinated Systems

To best serve children and families, agencies and organizations involved in the coordination and delivery of behavioral health services must work together. At minimum, they should understand the range of behavioral health services available for students and families and how to make referrals to these services. Intentional coordination around common messaging, shared data, common intake and referral processes, etc. will further increase access to and delivery of needed behavioral health services. This coordination should take place across all levels of public, private, and nonprofit agencies, including leadership and frontline staff.



#### Priority 5.A: Enhance cross-systems collaboration at all levels

- I. Maintain and grow the Sacramento County Student Mental Health and Wellness Collaborative
  - Identify diverse and representative students from each school district to serve as liaisons for the Collaborative
  - Invite representatives from Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans and private health and mental health care providers to join the Collaborative
- II. Use Sacramento County Student Mental Health and Wellness Collaborative meetings and events to build relationships and facilitate collaboration between multi-sector partners
  - Provide opportunities for shared learning about how different agencies and systems operate and their strengths and known limitations
  - Ensure information about new policies, programs, or initiatives is effectively communicated
- III. Provide opportunities for shared learning between school-based mental health providers and other public and private student behavioral health service providers to strengthen coordination and improve service delivery
- IV. Identify points of interactions between systems and partners where coordination is inefficient or ineffective, determine the causes of these issues, and work to mitigate them

#### Priority 5.B: Strengthen data collection and sharing

- I. Develop systems to facilitate secure information sharing and referrals between schools, service providers, and county agencies
- II. Establish a dashboard to share available county and district level data about student mental health and wellness with the community

#### Priority 5.C: Streamline referral and enrollment processes

- I. Create a universal referral form that captures key information about students and families, including insurance type
- II. Educate teachers, administrators, and other school personnel about the process for referring students for services
- III. Use navigators to facilitate referrals and help families enroll their students in services (see 2.A.II)

#### Priority 5.D: Identify and pursue funding opportunities and sources

- I. Build and maintain an inventory of available funding opportunities and funding sources related to student mental health
- II. Pursue new funding opportunities that allow for creative, flexible, and holistic approaches to mental health and wellness
- III. Strengthen the capacity of school districts and community-based partners to pursue competitive funding opportunities for mental health and wellness services and initiatives
- IV. Explore and pursue opportunities for repurposing of existing funding, potentially working with Local Educational Agencies on creative opportunities to enhance mental health and wellness on campus

# Conclusion

Sacramento County has been at the forefront of innovative approaches to support the behavioral health needs of children and youth. Building on existing strengths and successes, this plan provides a high-level vision and concrete strategies for continuing to improve the mental health and wellness of Sacramento County's diverse students and families and the professionals that serve them. The plan is intended to guide more detailed action planning at the county level and serve as a resource for districts, schools, and community organizations engaging in their own efforts to support student mental health and wellness. Additionally, as new resources for student mental health and wellness become available, this plan can inform decisions about how new resources are allocated and provide content for funding proposals.

Now more than ever we must prioritize the mental health and wellness of our students and the adults working to support them. To do this successfully we must take collective action to strengthen the pillars outlined above, including by resourcing and collaboratively implementing the priorities and strategies called for in this plan.

# Appendices

#### A. Acknowledgments

This plan would not be possible without the hundreds of community members who contributed their time, energy, and ideas about the future of student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County, including everyone who participated in the planning launch event, listening sessions, informational interviews, facilitated group discussions, and community survey. Thank you to the Sacramento County Student Mental Health and Wellness Collaborative for contributing to the development and review of this plan. Special thanks to the Sacramento County Behavioral Health Youth Advisory Board for contributing their ideas and co-facilitating the student listening session.

The Sacramento County Office of Education and Sacramento County Department of Health Services, Behavioral Health Services provided overall guidance and leadership for the development of this plan under the leadership of Superintendent David W. Gordon and Health Services Director Chevon Kothari. The following individuals participated as members of the project management team.

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- Christina Irizarry
- Melissa Jacobs
- Erica Jaramillo
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The <u>Glen Price Group</u> facilitated the planning process and coordinated the development of the plan.

#### B. Plan At-A-Glance

#### Vision

Sacramento County has a seamless and responsive system of care that empowers all students to be healthy, resilient, and successful.

#### Values

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Student and Family Centered
- Prevention
- Collaboration

#### **Pillars & Priorities**

school climate



Pillar 1: Schools as Centers of Wellness	Pillar 2: Whole Child and Whole Family Approaches	Pillar 3: Communication	Pillar 4: Responsive Workforce	Pillar 5: Coordinated Systems
<b>1.A</b> : Increase access to quality mental health services in schools	<b>2.A</b> : Assist students and their families to navigate and access mental health and wellness services	<b>3.A</b> : Promote an understanding of student mental health and wellness, share	<b>4.A</b> : Strengthen the pipeline of diverse mental health professionals	<b>5.A</b> : Enhance cross- systems collaboration at all levels
<b>1.B</b> : Expand student-led initiatives and elevate student voice	<b>2.B</b> : Address the mental health and wellness needs of the whole family	information, and reduce stigma	<b>4.B</b> : Provide ongoing professional development and supports for mental health professionals	<b>5.B</b> : Strengthen data collection and sharing
<b>1.C</b> : Build capacity for				<b>5.C</b> : Streamline referral and enrollment processes
educators to support student mental health and wellness	<b>2.C</b> : Meaningfully engage families in their student's mental health and wellness			<b>5.D</b> : Identify and pursue funding opportunities and sources
<b>1.D</b> : Promote wellness and strengths-based approaches to improve				

#### C. Discovery Report Summary

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#### Community-Based Discovery Report Summary

Building on previous and ongoing collaborative efforts, the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) and Sacramento County Department of Health Services, Behavioral Health Services (BHS) convened a participatory process to develop a new multi-year plan for student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County. The Glen Price Group (GPG) was engaged to facilitate this planning process.

The initial phase of the planning process, the Discovery Phase, included robust community engagement. The results from engagement efforts were captured in a Discovery Report and directly informed the contents of the Student Mental Health and Wellness plan. This document provides a high-level summary of the discovery process and findings. The full report is available at <u>this link</u>.

### **Discovery Approach**

The Discovery Phase launched in late 2021 and continued through Spring 2022. During this time, GPG worked with SCOE and BHS to engage a broad group of community members, including but not limited to families, students, teachers, school and local educational agency administrators and staff, school and community-based mental health clinicians, nonprofit organizations, and local government representatives. The Discovery Phase included the following engagement activities:

- A virtual launch event in late 2021 with over 120 participants
- 10 informational interviews
- Facilitated discussions with existing groups, including the Sacramento County Behavioral Health Youth Advisory Board, the Children's Clinical Outpatient Providers, the SCOE School-Based Clinicians, the Flexible Integrated Treatment (FIT) Providers, and the Ad Hoc Mental Health Coalition
- 6 community listening sessions with over 200 participants
- A student listening session co-facilitated with the Sacramento County Behavioral Health Youth Advisory Board with 7 participants<sup>7</sup>
- A community survey that received 260 complete responses
- Several meetings with the Sacramento County Student Mental Health and Wellness Collaborative

# **Discovery Findings**

At the planning launch event, participants were asked to respond to the question: "What does student mental health and wellness mean to you?" The image below captures the responses to this question, with the most frequently occurring words appearing in larger text.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The student listening session participants developed the youth-voice art projects included in this document



#### Student Mental Health and Wellness in Sacramento County Today

Throughout the Discovery Phase activities, community members were asked to share current strengths and challenges related to mental health and wellness in Sacramento County. The key themes that emerged from these conversations are listed below.

#### **Strengths and Successes**

- Increased awareness around mental health issues and services
- Schools are becoming centers for mental health and wellness
- Student-led mental health and wellness approaches are expanding
- Increased training and professional development around mental health issues
- Increased collaboration and coordination with community partners
- Family engagement

#### **Challenges and Gaps**

- Access to mental health services
- Need for more mental health professionals
- Parental/Caregiver mental health education and supports
- Community mental health and wellness education and engagement
- Communication
- Stigma
- Empowering educators with mental health and wellness knowledge and skills
- Substance use
- Data

#### Looking Ahead: Envisioning the Future of Student Mental Health & Wellness

Community members were asked to share their vision and wish for the future of student mental health and wellness in Sacramento County, priority issues for the plan to address, and potential ideas to make progress towards the vision and addressing priorities. Student listening session participants created artistic representations of their vision for student mental health and wellness which are included below.

#### Visions for the Future

- More accessible resources and services for all students
- Greater awareness of mental health and wellness concepts, issues, and services
- Integrating mental health and wellness into school environments and making schools hubs for service administration
- Mental health and wellness services are culturally responsive
- Increased focus on prevention
- Students are empowered in their mental health and wellness journeys
- Alternative forms of wellness and mental health support are offered and embraced
- Schools use a strengths perspective and refrain from punitive approaches

#### Priority Issues for the Plan to Address

- Increasing access to mental health and wellness services for students
- Increasing access to mental health and wellness services for parents and families of school-age children
- Recruiting and retaining qualified mental health professionals that demographically and culturally reflect the communities they serve
- Increasing access to mental health and wellness services for educators, administrators, and staff
- Training and supporting educators, administrators, and school staff about how to support student mental health and wellness
- Improving school climate, including better integration of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classrooms and increasing bullying prevention efforts

#### Ideas for Improving Student Mental Health and Wellness

- Schools as centers for mental health
- Increasing accessibility and awareness of services
- Culturally responsive services and workforce
- Mental health training for school staff
- Early prevention and intervention efforts
- Student-led approaches
- Destigmatize mental health and wellness
- Focus on socioeconomic factors and other social issues
- Mentoring
- Support for parents on how to support their children
- Improving communication, data sharing, and data collection
- Reallocating funds from law enforcement to mental health supports
- Capacity building and fund development for districts and community-based organizations

#### Youth-Voice Art Project

The following art projects were developed by Sacramento County youth and submitted prior to or during the student listening session. Thank you to the youth who shared their visions through these projects.





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