

Re-Engineering School-Linked Services

Stakeholder Convening #3

March 30, 2022

Today's Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Review and Reflection
- Update: Focus Group and Survey Results
- School-Linked Services and the Protective Factors
- Small Group Discussion: SLS Outcomes
- Next Steps and Q&A
- Adjourn



Welcome & Introductions

Progress-to-Date: Review and Reflections

Re-Engineering SLS: Review and Reflection

- Stakeholder Kickoff Convening – August 2021
- Environmental Scan – October 2021
- Government Partner Discussion – October 2021
- Focus Groups
 - School Administrators and Providers
 - Youth (Middle and High School), Parents and Caregivers
- Stakeholder Convenings
 - Convening #1 – January 27, 2022
 - Convening #2 – March 1, 2022
 - Convening #3 – March 30, 2022

Review and Reflection

- January 27, 2022, Stakeholder Convening:
 - Environmental Scan
 - Review and discussion of focus group and survey results to-date
 - Small group discussions of implications for recommendations
- March 1, 2022, Stakeholder Convening:
 - Review and discussion of focus group and survey results to-date
 - Overview of Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS)
 - Discussion on School-Linked Services and the Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Framework
 - Discussion on Identifying Populations of Focus

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Discussion on School-Linked Services and MTSS

- What services or supports should be universal/offered to all students (e.g., SEL, positive school climate, bullying prevention, suicide prevention)?
 - Information on community resources and public benefits, such Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications, immigrant services, and local food banks
 - Information on youth development programs, such as character education
 - Access to recreational activities
 - Additional information on youth resiliency programs, and provide professional development on Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) to all school administrators in NJ
 - Mental Health First Aid training for NJ students and communities

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Discussion on School-Linked Services and MTSS (continued)

- What services or supports should be offered to “at-risk” students?
 - Career orientation and career assessment programs
 - Assist students with identifying their education and employment goals
 - Provide additional information on available trade schools and entrepreneurship programs
 - Self-empowerment and self-esteem programs
 - Build partnerships with local hospitals to remedy gaps in psychiatric services within the community

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Discussion on School-Linked Services and MTSS (continued)

- What should be offered as part of SLS?
 - Positive youth development activities, such as helping youth understand their strengths to overcome obstacles
 - Implement guest speakers with lived experience and who are part of the community into peer mentorship programs
 - Make SLS services and programs currently available to students available to families
 - Ensure that programs are offered in appropriate spaces, mirroring a club and not in isolation
 - Comprehensive summer programming as a staple of SLS

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Discussion on School-Linked Services and MTSS (continued)

- How should SLS programs be staffed to provide services effectively?
 - Hire an Administrative Assistant that focuses on management information systems (MIS), data, and ensuring the accuracy of data entry
 - Ensure that program staff can build a therapeutic alliance and rapport with students

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Discussion on School-Linked Services and MTSS (continued)

- What services and supports should be offered by external organizations via partnerships and referrals?
 - Establish School-Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP) liaisons within the Children's System of Care (CSOC)
 - Raise awareness of Mobile Response, PerformCare, and CSOC's available resources.
 - Build awareness of SBYSP through school staff and provide attendance at Children's Interagency Coordinating Council (CIACC) and Care Management Organization meetings
- Do higher level formal partnerships (between state agencies) need to be put in place first?
 - Consider establishment of a statewide interagency council on children's mental health

Review and Reflection: Stakeholder Comments on Focus Group and Survey Findings

- Before increasing recruitment for youth and parent focus groups, identify goal of recruitment.
- The number of participants should be increased if certain population groups are underrepresented, not solely for the sake of increasing sample size.
- Translate surveys in Creole to meet the needs of Haitian populations.
- There is a need to assess the effectiveness of programs, and school administrators and providers should identify data being collected to demonstrate effective programming.
- Be mindful of using the term “at-risk” to identify students; it can be stigmatizing.
- Every community demonstrates different needs and a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach should not be utilized in the re-engineering process.

Update: Focus Group and Survey Results

Youth and Parent/Caregiver Focus Group and Survey Overview

- Participants included youth and parents/caregivers who have participated in SLS programs, as well as those who have not
- Focus groups provided youth and parents/caregivers with the opportunity to share the following:
 - Observations of student, peer, and family challenges
 - Positive and negative aspects of programs and activities they had participated in previously, either in school or within the community
 - Characteristics of identified programs and activities that fostered success in school and improved relationships with their families
 - Barriers and challenges to participating in programs and activities
 - Strategies that community can take to be more involved with the school

Youth Focus Group/Survey Overview

- Received thirty-two responses from youth between January and March 2022
 - One focus group with four participants
 - One focus group with three participants
 - Five individual discussions
 - Twenty survey responses
- Geographic Breakdown:
 - Five youth from Central NJ (Middlesex, Mercer County)
 - Eleven youth from South NJ (Ocean, Burlington, and Cumberland County)
 - Sixteen youth from North NJ (Warren, Essex, Passaic, Hunterdon)

Youth Focus Group/Survey Responses

• Student Challenges

- Increased mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression related to bullying, high academic workloads, and isolation from others during COVID-19 pandemic
- Increased substance use
- Increased sexual harassment and bullying on social media and in school
 - Increased homophobia and racism from other students
- Financial barriers; students must seek employment to assist families with paying bills

• Family Challenges

- Discomfort with sharing mental health concerns with parents/caregivers
- Financial barriers, such as lack of or inconsistent employment and inability to pay rent and utilities

Youth Focus Group/Survey Responses

• **Barriers to Attending Programs and Activities**

- Students and families lack reliable transportation to attend programs and counseling
- Mental health stigma prevents some students from seeking counseling
- Counseling sessions are only available during the day and immediately after school
 - Available counseling sessions may overlap with classes that students don't want to miss

Youth Focus Group/Survey Responses

• Program Considerations

- Provide comfortable and relaxing environment in school for students to discuss their challenges
- Provide resources and education on sexual harassment, consent, and bullying prevention
- Provide grief resources for students and school staff
- Offer counseling sessions via Zoom during evening hours to provide flexible scheduling options for students who participate in after-school clubs or activities
- Provide parent education workshops to families to enhance parent engagement and reduce mental health stigma
- Provide training resources to teachers working with students experiencing mental health challenges

Youth Focus Group/Survey Responses

- **Positive Experiences in Programs and Activities**

- Wellness rooms implemented in the school allow students to relax and cope with mental health challenges
- Mental health counseling has allowed students to build trust and interpersonal relationships, increase social skills, communication, and enhance emotional regulation skills

- **Challenges Experienced in Programs/Activities**

- Some counselors were not understanding of students' needs
- Not enough time to speak with SBYSP counselors during counseling sessions

Parent/Caregiver Focus Group/Survey Overview

- Received twenty-four responses from parent/caregivers between January and March 2022
 - Four focus groups with two participants each
 - Four individual discussions
 - Twelve survey responses
 - Surveys were translated in Spanish and Haitian Creole
- Geographic Breakdown:
 - Nine parents/caregivers from North NJ (Morris, Warren, and Hunterdon County)
 - Three parent/caregivers from Central NJ (Middlesex County)
 - Twelve parent/caregivers from South NJ (Ocean, Burlington, Cumberland, and Camden County)

Parent Focus Group/Survey Responses

- **Student Challenges**

- Mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety
- Increase in vaping and substance use challenges
- Increase in bullying and physical fights in school
- Academic challenges due to remote learning

- **Family Challenges**

- Parent/caregiver mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety
- Financial barriers such as lack of or inconsistent employment, inability to pay rent, utilities, and food

Parent Focus Group/Survey Responses

- **Barriers to Attending Programs and Activities**

- Families lack reliable transportation to attend programs
- Families are unable to engage in after-school activities with their children due to competing priorities (e.g., needing to work during times when after-school events or activities are offered)
- Lack of available after-school activities and clubs
- Language barrier among Spanish-speaking families in some schools

Parent Focus Group/Survey Responses

• Program Considerations

- Implement Strengthening Families in schools and/or communities
- Provide after-school recreational activities for youth (e.g., cooking class, healthy eating, life skills, painting, financial management, financial aid workshops)
- Offer before or after-school tutoring for students struggling with academics
- Provide support groups for parents via Zoom
- Provide parent workshops for families
- Provide basic needs and financial assistance to families, such as food, toiletries, or rent/utility assistance
- Provide career counseling and college preparation for students

Parent Focus Group/Survey Responses

- **Positive Experiences in Programs and Activities**
 - Strengthening Families program was a highly beneficial program that taught communication and other parenting skills to families
 - Programs allowed children to experience the following:
 - Education on a variety of topics
 - Feeling safe and supported by staff
 - Opportunity to build interpersonal relationships and socialize with peers
 - Access to mental health counseling and employment skills training

Parent/Caregiver Focus Group/Survey Responses

• Challenges Experienced in Programs and Activities

- Lack of organization in after-school activities or programs
- Lack of supervision or direct instruction from staff members in some programs
 - Dissatisfaction with instructional methods staff utilized in programs
 - Experiences with rude staff
 - Receiving judgment from the facilitator of a parenting class
- Lack of consistency and connection with children during in-home therapy
- Insufficient promotion/advertisement of youth programs

Update: School Administrator Focus Groups and Surveys

- Received twenty-six responses total from school administrators between November 2021 and March 2022
 - Three focus groups with five participants total
 - Twenty-one survey responses
- Geographic breakdown:
 - Twenty-one responses from South NJ (Cape May, Ocean and Gloucester counties)
 - Five responses from North NJ (Bergen, Middlesex, and Passaic counties)

Update: Provider Focus Groups and Surveys

- Received twenty-eight responses total from providers between November 2021 and March 2022
 - Six focus groups with 18 participants total
 - Ten survey responses
- Geographic breakdown:
 - Fourteen responses from South NJ (Cape May, Ocean, Atlantic, and Gloucester counties)
 - Eleven responses from North NJ (Bergen, Sussex, Middlesex, and Passaic counties)
 - Three responses from Central NJ (Monmouth and Mercer county)

Family Strengths Survey Analysis

- State-wide survey conducted by Rutgers Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling assessed potential indicators/characteristics for child behavioral health concerns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Characteristics that were associated with fair or poor mental health concerns include:
 - Poor relationships among household members
 - Poor behavioral health among household members
 - Lack of access to social support
 - High school-related needs
 - Higher safety concerns
 - Delay/lack of access to medical care, housing, employment, and childcare concerns

Group Discussion

What stands out to you?

School-Linked Services and Protective Factors

Review of Values and Protective Factors

- DCF's strategic efforts and SLS programs are grounded in:
 - DCF Core Values
 - Protective Factors Framework
 - Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Protective Factors
 - DCF and Strengthening Families Family Protective Factors
 - YouthThrive Protective and Promotive Factors

DCF Core Values

Collaboration

Equity

Evidence

Family

Centers for Disease Control Protective Factors¹

Individual Protective Factors

- Caregivers who create safe, positive relationships with children
- Caregivers who practice nurturing parenting skills and provide emotional support
- Caregivers who can meet basic needs of food, shelter, education, and health services
- Caregivers who have a college degree or higher and have steady employment

Family Protective Factors

- Families with strong social support networks and stable, positive relationships with the people around them
- Families where caregivers are present and interested in the child
- Families where caregivers enforce household rules and engage in child monitoring
- Families with caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors

Community Protective Factors

- Communities with access to safe, stable housing
- Communities where families have access to high-quality preschool
- Communities where families have access to nurturing and safe childcare
- Communities where families have access to safe, engaging after school programs and activities
- Communities where families have access to medical care and mental health services
- Communities where families have access to economic and financial help
- Communities where adults have work opportunities with family-friendly policies

¹ Centers for Disease Control. "Risk and Protective Factors." Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>

DCF Strategic Plan/Strengthening Families Protective Factors

- **Family Protective Factors²:**

- Parental Resilience

- Social Connections

- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

² Center for the Study of Social Policy. “Introduction to Strengthening Families: A Protective Factors Framework.” Available at

<https://cssp.org/resource/strengtheningfamilies101/>

DCF/Strengthening Families Protective Factors

- **Parental resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma
- **Social connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:** Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development

DCF/Strengthening Families Protective Factors (continued)

- **Concrete Support in Times of Need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children:** Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships

YouthThrive Framework

- **Protective and Promotive Factors³:**

- Youth Resilience

- Social Connections

- Knowledge of Adolescent Development

- Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

³ Center for the Study of Social Policy. “Youth Thrive: Opportunities into Action.” Available at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>

Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors

- **Youth Resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with stress, challenges, or adversity.
- **Social Connections:** Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, places, communities, and a force greater than oneself that promote a sense of trust, belonging, and that one matters.
- **Knowledge of Adolescent Development:** Understanding the unique changes and assets of adolescence and implementing policies and practices that reflect a deep understanding of development.

YouthThrive Protective and Promotive Factors (continued)

- **Concrete Support in Times of Need:** Making sure youth receive quality, equitable, respectful services that meet their basic needs (health care, housing, education, nutrition, income), and teaching youth to ask for help and advocate for themselves.
- **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence:** Acquiring skills and attitudes that are essential for forming an independent, positive identity and having a productive and satisfying adulthood.

Small Group Discussion

Think, Pair, Share

Think, Pair, Share

- **THINK:** Reflect on your own response to the questions in the next slide (5 min)
- **PAIR:** Share your reflections in your small group and post group responses to Jamboard (10 min)
- **SHARE:** Small groups share their ideas and recommendations with the full group (15 minutes)

Small Group Discussion Questions

- What outcomes should School-Linked Services seek to achieve for each of the following?
- How should those outcomes be measured?
 - Students (Group 1)
 - Families (Group 2)
 - School (Group 3)
 - Community (Group 4)

Next Steps, Questions and Answers

Next Steps

- CHCS to draft recommendations and submit to DCF
- CHCS to finalize recommendations
- DCF to release recommendations to:
 - advisory committee
 - post to public-facing website



Questions?

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