

One District's Journey to Support the Whole Child



Customer: Hilbert School District

Industry: Education - Schools/Districts interested in learning about school mental health system implementation

Author: Elizabeth Langteau and Jen Konen, CESA 6 Social Emotional Learning



Who

The Hilbert School District is a rural 3K-12 district in northeast Wisconsin, serving approximately 480 students. In 2018, they formed a team tasked with implementing comprehensive school mental health. At that time, they had one school counselor district-wide and had just invested in a new position: Student Support Specialist. In the fall of 2018, they partnered with CESA 6's Allies in Mental Health Education (AMHE) to advance their work.

Problem

Hilbert School District's Transformation in Mental Health Support

The good news is that we are talking about it: mental health, specifically the mental health of our youth. The numbers are alarming. 1 in 5 students is experiencing a mental health problem, and 38%* Wisconsin's High School students report "feeling sad and hopeless." The majority of Wisconsin high school students (58.1%) reported experiencing one or more of the following in the past 12 months: depression, anxiety, self-harm, or suicidal ideation.** Behind each of these numbers is a child, and schools are uniquely positioned to be agents of change and systems of support. Mental health includes mental wellness, and schools are places where connection and relationships, the most significant protective factor, can be centered. They are places where children can connect with trusted adults, establish meaningful peer relationships and school connections, and enjoy the benefits of being part of a community.

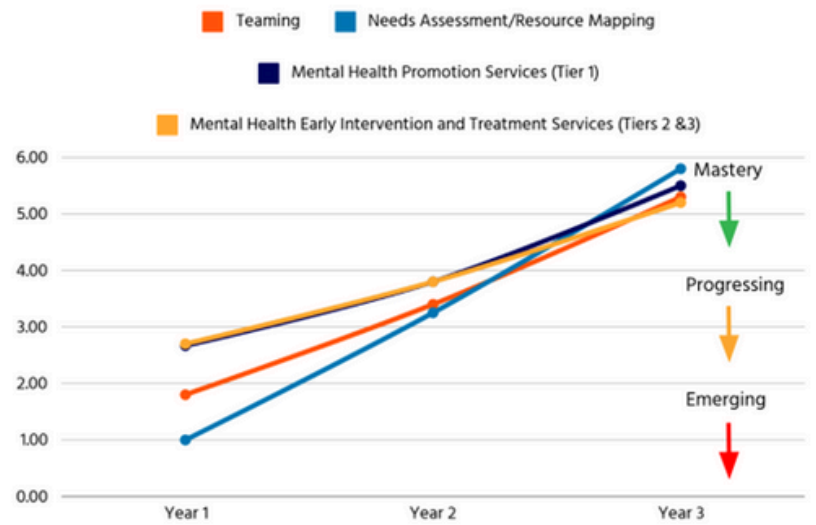


The Hilbert School District in rural Calumet County began to tackle the issue of mental health in a systemic and strategic way in the fall of 2018. They convened a team consisting of teachers, school leadership, and pupil services staff. They completed the **SHAPE (School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation)**, an assessment tool and improvement system hosted by the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, to understand where they were starting and establish a baseline. Their scores on the first assessment were all in the "emerging" range...but it wouldn't be long before their improvement efforts would shift those scores into the "progressing" and "mastery" ranges.

The school district invested in their own personal growth journeys, which they quickly expanded to include their whole school community. They recognized that school mental health is truly a team sport, that all staff needed to come along on the journey, and that the school culture also needed to support adult mental health and wellness. They engaged in monthly team meetings and committed to the improvement and implementation of science, systematically identifying strengths and needs in order to build a sustainable system.

They focused their first-year efforts on resource mapping/needs assessment and referral pathways/teaming. By the end of that first year, they had clearly identified existing resources, identified areas for growth, and had a clear pathway for staff and students to connect to additional mental health support. From there, they tackled universal supports so all students were supported and established processes for early intervention and treatment services.

When Hilbert School District completed the SHAPE again a year later, they reflected, “When we took the SHAPE last fall, we weren’t really even sure what the questions were asking. It feels so affirming to have done the learning we have done so far and to see our students getting more support and access to mental health supports.” Since then, the district has also strengthened universal support for all students and established mental health screening and on-site clinical mental health services, dramatically reducing the barriers to mental health access and tackling the stigma of help-seeking.



This graph reflects growth over three years in the three domains the team prioritized.

That doesn’t mean they didn’t face challenges along the way. System change sometimes means two steps forward and three steps back. It was important to the team to create sustainable systems, which continues to be a challenge with volatility in school mental health funding. In 2023, the team wrote the state’s school-based mental health grant for the third time. As a small school, they have no grant writers - these were dedicated staff working nights and weekends to secure funding for essential services, only to find out the grant was no longer a viable funding source after submission. Instead, they could expect to receive about \$31 a student. GASP. Instead of \$75,000 of funding they had access to, they would now have about \$14,000.

Despite these challenges, they continue to adjust and prioritize to meet the mental health needs of their students. They continue to improve the system they created while navigating the frequent, often unpredictable shifts in funding for school mental health, which have recently hit small, rural schools the hardest. They are proud of expanding their work to involve supporting the whole child with their 4K-12 mental health program!

Growing Allies in Mental Health Education

CESA 6 provides on-site team coaching, customized professional development informed by the participant's needs, and opportunities for the teams to collaborate and learn from one another.

