



California
Center for
School Climate



AUDIO GALLERY

Santa Clara County
Office of Education

SANTA CLARA, CA

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IMPROVING STUDENT WELLNESS WITH A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

In 2021/22, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) invested nearly \$25 million in Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded centers that deliver health services at school-based sites across the nation. These awards will improve and expand models that support partnerships between schools and community health organizations to provide accessible, quality physical and mental health care to youth on or near school campuses. According to HHS, one in nine children access primary care through an HRSA-funded health center throughout the country, making this a timely, vital investment.¹

Today, California is home to over 293 school-based health centers (SBHCs), ensuring over 286,000 students have access to high-quality health services.² Research has shown that offering medical, dental, vision, and other types of health services by establishing SBHCs in schools can positively impact student, family, and school outcomes in disciplinary referrals, family engagement, and social and emotional health.³ These centers also prove critical in improving health access for underserved populations as families navigating transportation, financial, and other access barriers can receive low or no-cost care at SBHCs.⁴ The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) recently developed a model to formalize school-based health offerings throughout the 32 LEAs, public charter schools, and early care and education programs it supports countywide. Based on a multi-tiered system of support, the SCCOE wellness center model addresses the root causes of mental, physical, and social health issues within the community through a range of preventative, group, and individual services. As of the 2022/23

school year, the county has established 12 wellness centers across elementary, middle, and high schools serving over 8,966 students.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the SCCOE team noticed significant needs that manifested through increased rates of anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and substance use. When lockdowns and other pandemic-related disruptions increased social isolation among youth, county leadership determined that an expansion of wellness centers on school sites was crucial to responding to these needs. Students seeking mental health care are 21 more times likely to visit school-based health centers than community mental health centers and the presence of school-based mental health providers improves attendance, achievement, and school safety overall.⁵ Dr. Mary Ann Dewan, County Superintendent of Schools, prioritized a whole-school, whole-child, whole-community approach by investing in training and resources for all school staff to ensure that students have access to wraparound wellness supports. To assess community needs and inform their expansion, the team conducted interviews with community members and explored opportunities to blend and braid funding. Partnerships with the county's Behavioral Health Services Department and local Medi-Cal Managed Care organizations have also been vital in connecting students and families to health services. Philanthropic organizations such as the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and Blue Shield have provided funding to support launch, evaluation, and strategic communication activities for the county's model. Ultimately, the county seeks to establish a wellness center on every school campus in Santa Clara County.

As they developed the SBWC model, county leaders thought deeply about how to create schools as centers of wellness and identified mental health as the root of student needs. Executive Director of Youth Health and Wellness at SCCOE, Dr. Chaunise "Chaun" Powell, emphasized the importance of adapting multi-tiered

Characteristics	
Number of students countywide	253,625
Geographic setting	Various

Student Demographics	
Latinx	38.4%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	31.4%
White	17.8%
Multiracial	5.5%
Black	1.8%
Native American/Alaska Native	0.3%
Students with disabilities	11%
English language learners	22%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	37%

Data sourced from the [State of Education in Santa Clara County](#).

services to fit the unique needs of the diverse population in the county. The range of wellness center programming includes drop-in calming spaces that offer student-driven self-regulation activities, targeted wellness and therapeutic groups, as well as individual counseling and crisis services. Though many benefit from clinical or talk-based therapies, alternative therapies can be offered in the form of music, art, and recreational activities. Student wellness advisory groups within the county advocated for these types of offerings as more informal, welcoming opportunities to support student mental health. An emerging evidence base has demonstrated the benefits of these types of mindfulness and stress management activities for educators and students.⁶ More than 7,000 students have come to county-operated wellness centers since the model was established. The team has also analyzed student exit surveys, behavioral health metrics, and health screenings to assess engagement levels and wellness outcomes, all of which suggest that school-based wellness centers are supporting the needs of students while improving the efficacy of teachers.

References

- ¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2022, May 3). *HHS awards nearly \$25 million to expand access to school-based health services* [Press release]. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/05/03/hhs-awards-nearly-25-million-expand-access-school-based-health-services.html>
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- ⁵ Juszczak, L., Melinkovich, P., & Kaplan, D. (2003). Use of health and mental health services by adolescents across multiple delivery sites. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 32(6), 108–118; Lapan, R., Whitcomb, S., & Aleman, N. (2012). Connecticut professional school counselors: College and career counseling services and smaller ratios benefit students. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(2), 117–124.
- ⁶ Renshaw, T. L., Fischer, A. J., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2017). Mindfulness-based interventions in school psychology. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 21(4), 299–303. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40688-017-0166-6>



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Consider while you listen . . .

The Santa Clara County Office of Education has expanded and formalized a wellness center model in recent years to improve healthcare access at school sites. **What types of wellness services are currently offered at campuses in your school or district? How might students, families, and staff benefit from increased medical, mental, and physical healthcare on campus?**

Dr. Chaunise “Chaun” Powell, Director of Youth Health and Wellness at SCCOE, pointed out that mindfulness and recreational activities are an important part of an inclusive, welcoming wellness center model. **Where can students who feel stressed or overwhelmed currently turn to at your school or district? How might spaces and activities that are dedicated to self-regulation and mindfulness support student mental health and classroom engagement?**