



Testimony to House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Mental Health Program in Schools



Melissa Zieammermann

WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS | STUDENT SUPPORT DIRECTOR OF BEHAVIOR

WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE TEAM

- A) Melissa Zieammermann, Student Support Director of Behavior, USD 259
- B) mzieammermann@usd259.net
- C) HB 2444—Mental Health Intervention Team Program Act
- D) Proponent
- E) March 8, 2023

Wichita Public Schools is the largest school district in Kansas, educating approximately 10% of all public school students in the state of Kansas, and more than half of all school-aged children in Sedgwick County. USD 259 has over 47,000 students with 78.7% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Of these 47,517 students, 7,698 receive special education services. There is a high level of need for mental health services within the community.

ComCare and Wichita Public Schools USD #259 was one of the original sites for the school and mental health pilots. In the original project, twenty-one behavioral health school liaisons (BHSLs) were hired by USD 259 with the funds appropriated by the legislature and a team of school-based therapists and case managers by ComCare. They served twenty-one school buildings. Over the years, since the inception of this grant, USD 259 and ComCare now have thirty BHSLs that serve thirty-six schools.

As a result of this grant, and the collaboration of USD 259 and ComCare, 2,219 students have received mental health services as part of their school day. Of those 2,219 students, 928 have had improved attendance (67.5%), 1,026 have showed improved externalizing behavior (68%), 793 have shown improved academics (56%), 770 have shown improved internalizing behaviors (63%), and 440 foster students have been served.

Program Successes:

- Increased access to mental health services. Many families do not have the resources or time to take off for appointments. As a result of this grant this barrier is removed because students and families are seen in the neighborhood school building.
- Increased conversation about mental health.
- BHSLs in schools are holding groups and serve as a valued member of the Social-Emotional Learning team.
- Our teachers and staff have become so familiar and comfortable with referring that we never have a shortage of referrals, and we have eyes on our kids, from the quietest kid to the kid with the loudest behaviors.
- Students are really seeking out the services and meet with the MHIT team frequently. BHSL's are well utilized throughout schools.
- The school continues to welcome and embrace the program. Students who have been in the program are making progress.

Program Successes: (continued)

- The BHSL presence in the building allows them to assist with student behaviors. Teachers come to the BHSLs for help on particularly challenging students, and they work with them on how to be successful in the classroom. There are many students for whom they have become a regular point of contact. They are often the ones who can get them regulated when others cannot.

WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE TEAM

Specific Success Story:

A specific school that in the past had a clinician that visited it once a week, and had three students in services, was added to MHIT in 2021. This school is in an area that was identified by the vice mayor as being, “mental-health poor.” That means this particular area did not have as much access to mental health services as other areas of the city. The district decided to add this building into MHIT and add a part time Behavioral Health School Liaison (BHSL). In collaboration with ComCare, this building now has 31 students in services. This has been primarily because of the BHSL. The BHSL is able to form relationships with parents, students, and the community, which has brought an awareness to mental health needs in this area of the city. In addition, this grant removes the transportation barrier and makes it so students can stay at school to receive services, thus making it possible that parents do not have to miss work to take them to appointments.

Program Needs:

- Increased therapists and Integrated Care Specialists, so that all buildings in the grant have access to a clinician, rather than having to split them between multiple buildings.
- Additional options for partnering with other entities to provide services in schools, making it possible that this program can be expanded to all USD 259 schools.

###