

# Re-Engineering School-Linked Services (SLS) Stakeholder Convening Notes March 30, 2022

## Attendees

**Stakeholder Workgroup:** Gary Nelson (Willingboro High School SBYSP), Delia Menendez (Union City Public Schools), Beverly Canady (Irvington High School, The Bridge SBYSP), Bob Guarasci (New Jersey Community Development Corporation), Dave Seegert (Preferred Behavioral Health Group), Shadaya Bennett (Office of Senator Ruiz), and Senator Vin Gopal, Michael Illiano, and Jenna Lopez (all in the Office of Senator Gopal)

**NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Family and Community Partnerships:** Sanford Starr, Jenira Hill, April Scott, Sukanya Varadhan, Monique Mander

**Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS):** Kamala Allen, Isabel Clemente

## Welcome, Introductions, and Review of Agenda

- Sanford Starr, Assistant Commissioner of the DCF Division of Family and Community Partnerships, welcomed participants to the third stakeholder convening.
- CHCS provided an overview of the agenda.

## Review and Reflection on Re-Engineering Process

- CHCS provided an overview on progress-to-date since the August 2021 stakeholder kick-off meeting. Additional activities since then have included an environmental scan, a government partner discussion, focus groups (with school administrator/providers, youth, and parents/caregivers), and a series of stakeholder convenings to share and solicit feedback on the input received through the discussions and focus groups described (January through March 2022).
- CHCS shared a summary of responses from the March 1, 2022, large group discussion on School-Linked Services (SLS), Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS), focus group and survey responses.
  - CHCS encouraged stakeholders to respond to summary of feedback provided.
  - Some stakeholders reported being surprised that mental health was not identified as an area of need during the review and reflection of School-Linked Services and MTSS.

# Update on Focus Group and Survey Results

## Youth, Parent/Caregiver, and School Admin/Provider Focus Group and Survey Feedback

- CHCS provided an update on responses collected and an overview of the topics that youth and parents/caregivers were asked during focus groups and surveys, including the following:
  - Student, peer, and family challenges
  - Positive and negative aspects of programs/ activities
  - Characteristics of programs/activities that foster school success and family relationships
  - Barriers to participating in programs/activities
  - Strategies that the community can take to be more involved with schools
- Updated results from youth, parent, and caregiver focus groups and surveys include:
  - Student Challenges:
    - Increased sexual harassment, homophobia, and racism (youth)
  - Family Challenges:
    - Discomfort sharing mental health issues with parents/caregivers (youth)
    - Parent/caregiver mental health challenges (parents)
  - Barriers to Attending Programs:
    - Mental health stigma prevents students from seeking counseling (youth)
    - Language barriers among Spanish-speaking families (parents)
  - Program Considerations:
    - Resources on sexual harassment, consent, bullying prevention, and grief (youth)
    - Counseling for students on Zoom and in the evenings (youth)
    - Offer before or after-school tutoring for students struggling with their academics (parents)
  - Positive Experiences in Programs/Activities:
    - Wellness rooms in schools have helped with emotional regulation skills (youth)
    - Mental health counseling to build trust and social/emotional skills (youth)
  - Challenges Experienced in Programs/Activities or:
    - Dissatisfaction with instructional methods utilized by staff in programs/activities and experiences with rude staff (parents)
    - Not enough time with counselors and some counselors don't fully understand students' needs (youth)

## Family Strengths Survey Analysis

- CHCS provided an overview of the Family Strengths Survey conducted by Rutgers Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling to provide additional data that overlap with key findings from focus group and survey results conducted by CHCS.
- Survey results identified the following characteristics associated with fair or poor mental health concerns:
  - Poor relationships with household members
  - Poor behavioral health among household members
  - Lack of access to social support

- High school-related needs
- Higher safety concerns
- Delay and/or lack of access to medical care, housing, and employment
- CHCS facilitated group discussion and reactions to focus group and survey results.
  - Stakeholders had no reactions to above responses

## Overview of Protective Factors

- DCF discussed their strategic efforts for re-engineering SLS programming to further define risk and protective factor outcomes. DCF's strategic efforts and SLS programs are grounded in their core values and the CDC, DCF Strategic Plan/Strengthening Families, and YouthThrive protective factors. Some protective factors include the following:
  - Youth and/or Parental Resilience
  - Strong social support networks/connections
  - Social and emotional competence of children
  - Knowledge of Child and Adolescent Development

## Small Group Discussions

- CHCS facilitated small group discussions (via a Think-Pair-Share format) based on desired outcomes for SLS through the risk and protective factor frameworks. Conversations focused on student and family outcomes as well as school and community outcomes.
- Small group discussion questions and stakeholder responses included the following:
  - What outcomes should SLS seek to achieve for students and families?
    - *Measuring youth growth through mental health, job preparation, civic and community service projects, and healthy youth development*
  - What outcomes should SLS seek to achieve for schools and communities?
    - *Reduced stigma for accessing mental health services*
    - *Improved grades via report cards*
    - *Graduation rates and increased college acceptance rates via school records*
    - *Reduced youth violence in schools and communities*
    - *Improved attendance during community events*
    - *Community service projects in local community measured by impact (e.g., number of park benches purchased through fundraising)*
    - *Building connections with isolated senior citizens with pre and post-test measures to determine impact of the youth/senior connection*
  - How should the identified outcomes be measured for students and families?
    - *State Independent Living Program utilizes the Ansel Casey scale to determine whether youth have mastered particular skills before exiting SBYSP.*
  - How should the identified outcomes be measured for schools and communities?
    - *Analysis of school and police records, along with community-wide surveys*
    - *Pre and post-tests, as appropriate*

- *Support for policies that demonstrate positive impact on community/school wellness, regardless of affiliation*

## Next Steps

- CHCS provided an overview of next steps in the SLS re-engineering process:
  - CHCS to draft recommendations and submit to DCF
  - CHCS to finalize recommendations
  - DCF to release recommendations to:
    - advisory committee
    - post to public-facing website
- CHCS will share the slides from today's session to allow stakeholders additional time to provide feedback on youth, family, school, and community outcomes.