

Conversations About Georgia's Children's Wellbeing Give Way to Actions

Spotlight on GaDOE's New Office of School Safety and Climate

An Interview with Dr. Garry McGiboney, Deputy Superintendent of Schools



Dr. Garry McGiboney

GPAD: As you know, Georgia Project AWARE's federal SAMHSA grant ends this month. Many regard you not only as a major supporter of Project AWARE, but one of the early champions of children's mental health in the State. Before we discuss the work of the newly-formed Office of School Safety and Climate, GPAD would like for you to first reflect on the contributions that you think Project AWARE has made to the landscape of children's mental health in schools. Is there anything that stands out to you?

McGiboney: Oh, yes. Frankly, five years ago, there wasn't much focus on mental health, especially in schools. That's why I was excited about Georgia getting the SAMSHA Project AWARE grant. I saw its potential for helping to increase awareness of children's overall mental wellbeing. In my thinking, mental health occurs on a continuum of severity from 1 to 10. On this continuum, one (1) could be situational, like the loss of a pet or a family member and the emotional or mental anguish that accompanies that loss. That's not a mental illness, but a mental health challenge.

Five years ago, few people made an association between school violence, school dropout rate, school climate, substance abuse and children's mental wellness. Project AWARE has raised awareness of those connections but also changed the conversations that we're now having about children's mental wellbeing.

GPAD: Speaking of changing the conversations, nearly three years ago, you gave the opening keynote presenta-

tion during the Georgia Department of Education's Children's Mental Health Summit that focused on Taking the Next Steps. Based on the feedback received from stakeholders attending the summit, a number of them seemed to connect with you on many accounts, but especially found your quote on changing the conversation inspirational. You said, "No significant and sustainable change has ever taken place without first changing the conversation." How have the conversations about children's mental health changed over the last three to five years?

McGiboney: There was little conversation about mental health and, if so, it was in hushed tones and if it was discussed the focus was only on the more serious mental illness issues. No one wanted to admit that children have mental health issues and physical health issues that are manifested in behavior. That was too extreme and private. On that 1 to 10 continuum that I mentioned, serious mental illness is a 10. Today, through training such as NAMI's (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Ending the Silence, educators and students are learning to speak up and out about mental health challenges in our schools on the full continuum. More teachers are requesting information about

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children's mental health challenges and want more specific training on the causes of behavior. I have testified before five different study committees over the last five years. What I've noticed is that, at first, the message did not seem to be connecting. Yet over time, the conversations seem to have become more relevant based on the types of questions that I have been getting from many people.

GPAD: What types of conversations are you hearing from school mental health practitioners?

McGiboney: In the schools, school psychologists are asking more questions about the contribution of behavioral and physical problems to mental wellness. Conversations are focusing more on attribution — the assignment of cause to behavior. That's important because our reaction

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to someone's behavior has as much or more to do with why we think they acted that way than the behavior itself. For example, in Cobb County School System, school psychologists must now come up with at least three possible causes of a child's behavioral problem when sharing information with parents and teachers. According to Dr. Christy Jaffe, Director of Cobb's School Psychology Program, this approach has resulted in a more thoughtful way of looking at students' disruptive behavior. It is a fact that everything gets manifested through behavior. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the number one symptom of hunger is assertive or aggressive behavior. And that leads me to offer a cautionary note: Every child who has a behavioral problem in school should not be viewed as having a mental health problem. If not careful, that line of thinking can move us toward over-identification of children with mental illness, like we once did in special education. Frankly, I think that the conversations of school professionals like school psychologists are showing us that there is now an intentional effort to think more broadly about what may be contributing to children's wellbeing and the determinants of misbehavior. All school personnel need

The best way to pay attention to mental health in schools is to pay attention to school climate. School climate is a protective factor for students' mental health. It is a gauge of their mental wellbeing.

to think about mental health in the broadest sense. Mental health is not the same as mental illness, and mental health and mental illness can be impacted as much by external factors as internal factors. The best way to pay attention to mental health in schools is to pay attention to school climate. School climate is a protective factor for students' mental health. It is a gauge of their mental wellbeing.

GPAD: You previously mentioned your testimonies before numerous legislative committees to discuss the state of children's mental health in Georgia over the years. What are a couple of the messages that you feel you have been able to drive home that have set the stage for change?

McGiboney: Maybe I've helped to initiate, deepen and keep the conversations going around children's mental health in a child wellbeing sense. More importantly, I believe that we have helped to underscore the need for Georgia to have a coordinated, comprehensive mental health plan that is not just mental health but includes physical health,

too — an integrated wellness approach. During the 2019 Georgia General Assembly, the Legislature created a Behavioral Health Reform Commission. Governor Kemp is in the process of appointing individuals to serve on this body for four years. Part of the commission's charge will be to identify strengths and address issues relating to the behavioral and mental health needs of all Georgians. Issues to be addressed will likely include service access, workforce development, special needs of rural populations, use of telehealth in service delivery, etc. Mental health practitioners

Although the federal funding for Georgia Project AWARE is ending, the State will continue to benefit from numerous off-shoots of Project AWARE.

will be among those appointed to serve on the commission. With the appointment of the Behavioral Health Reform Commission, the stage really will be set for seismic change across behavioral and mental health systems in Georgia.

GPAD: Are there specific efforts underway to sustain such programs as Project AWARE, APEX, Georgia HOPE, etc. that target children?

McGiboney: In terms of APEX, the Governor has added more funding to this program, which will allow an expansion of services beyond the 400 existing schools. There are plans to expand to high schools. Although the federal funding for Georgia Project AWARE is ending, the State will continue to benefit from numerous off-shoots of Project AWARE. To be clear, Project AWARE has been a catalyst for the integration of a number of existing school-based practices, frameworks, and initiatives. Let me run through just a few of the off-shoots of Project AWARE.

- *Sources of Strength* is being adopted and implemented in many school districts.
- The Georgia Legislature approved \$1 million dollars to offer additional *Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)* training.
- *Suicide Prevention training* will be continued. Currently over 2,000 individuals have participated in this training.
- *Public forums* will be co-sponsored by Voices for Georgia's Children, The Carter Center, and Georgia Appleseed Law Center to educate the public about children's mental health needs, solicit community feedback and, literally, continue the conversations about children's mental wellness.
- In the new *Office of School Safety and Climate*, a menu of 18 training options will be available to educators on a

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range of topics pertaining to children's behavioral, social, emotional and mental wellness skills.

GPAD: Finally, before we move on to a discussion of the Office of School Safety and Climate, I wonder if there are other crucial conversations remaining?

McGiboney: Conversations have been maturing. At GaDOE we have begun conversations about school-based integrated wellness. This term is being used to refer to the needs of the whole child — physical, mental, social, and emotional. Integrated wellness takes into consideration that there are professionals from various disciplines who are concerned about different aspects of a child's wellness. So I think one of the next logical conversations should be about what else can impact a child's behavior. For example, the research is showing that skill deficits in expressive and receptive language impact behavior.

In my view, the workforce shortage of mental health practitioners is one of the most crucial conversations remaining. This issue can't be fixed overnight and we need to see what we can do now to overcome the negative

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impacts of children and families not having access to sufficient numbers of mental health providers. Not only is this a crucial conversation to have, but it's got to involve looking at some non-traditional solutions that involve what we have in place now. In my experience, peer counseling could be a right-now solution as we tackle the more complex issues relating to training and certifying personnel. On the 1-10 continuum I mentioned earlier, peer support could be very effective in addressing the lower-end needs of children and adults. With this being a lower-level intervention, it may be useful to train a cadre of peer counselors or peer support specialists in all 159 counties and make them the first line of response when mental health providers are not available. This approach is not altogether without precedent. We've got to be willing to add such approaches to our ongoing, open conversations to learn what's possible, and what's not.

Inside the Office of School Safety and Climate — GaDOE's Newest Division

Launched: April 2019

Leadership: Garry McGiboney, PhD, Deputy Superintendent

Divisions: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Safe and Supportive Schools

Advisory Committee: Composed of more than 25 members including: local school superintendents, principals, teachers, facilities managers, and chief of police; GaDOE executive directors and program managers; Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (GDBHDD); Family Connection; Georgia Emergency Management Agency, Homeland Security

Vision: Provide safe, healthy, and secure schools for all students and school personnel at all times in all situations.

Mission: The Georgia Department of Education is committed to providing a safe, secure, and productive learning and working climate for all students and staff in all schools through the development and implementation of intervention and prevention programs. This is accomplished by providing training, technical assistance, and support to local school districts and local schools in collaboration with other state agencies and stakeholders.

Mission Areas:

- **Prevention** – Actions and strategies to create conditions in schools that establish positive, safe, and secure school climates
- **Protection** – Actions to reduce the vulnerabilities of schools and resources in order to deter, mitigate, or neutralize threats against school safety and school climate
- **Response** – Actions that provide support for schools in response to any type of incident that significantly disrupts the school safety and/or operations and school climate
- **Recovery** – Actions that assist schools in the recovery phase following an incident that jeopardized the security and safety of schools and its students and school personnel and compromised school climate



Little Known Fact: Approximately 40 Georgia State laws reference school safety and climate.

Webpage: <https://www.gadoe.org/schoolsafetyclimate/Pages/default.aspx>.

Spotlight on GaDOE's New Office of School Safety and Climate

GPAD: Thank you for those reflections, Dr. McGiboney. Let's shift our discussion to the new GaDOE Office of School Safety and Climate, which you head. What was the catalyst for creating this office?

McGiboney: After the incidents of violence in schools across our nation, there is now the realization that there may be a correlation to school climate. Following more recent incidents of school violence, legislators, school superintendents and others have wanted to focus more on mental health and school climate, not just cameras and resource officers. Students are not going to tell adults in the school what's going on if the school climate is negative and the students don't trust adults. That's because they don't feel that they belong... This isn't their school. When there's positive school climate, students will let you know what's going on. They care about the school because they have good relations with the adults and other kids.

GPAD: In the office's name, is it coincidental that Safety comes before Climate?

McGiboney: No, not really. The most important part is that

The Governor and State Superintendent of Schools are to be credited for creating an office that sends a powerful message: "It is essential that safety and school climate be intertwined."

the two are linked. Georgia is the only state in the nation that has an educational office that links school safety and climate. The Governor and State Superintendent of Schools are to be credited for creating an office that sends a powerful message: "It is essential that safety and school climate be intertwined."

GPAD: What is the overarching purpose of this office and how is it staffed?

McGiboney: The office exists to assist the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) with its commitment to provide safe, secure, and productive learning and working climates for all students and school personnel. Our diverse personnel utilize strategies to support this purpose including the development and implementation of intervention and

About Garry McGiboney, PhD

Dr. McGiboney currently serves as the Deputy State Superintendent for the new Office of School Safety and Climate at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). Before joining GaDOE he worked in district administration and elementary, middle, high and alternative schools. Dr. McGiboney has a Ph.D. in both school psychology and administration from Georgia State University. He was appointed by the Governor of Georgia to serve on the Joint Study Committee on Mental Health Access. He also serves by appointment on the Georgia Supreme Court's Justice for Children Committee; the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative Steering Committee of the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform; the Georgia Accrediting Commission; and he is Chair of the Executive Steering Committee of a multi-million dollar National Institute of Justice grant.

Dr. McGiboney has over 30 professional journal publications on education, psychology, and youth-related issues, and he is the author of eight books: *Student Relations and Discipline*; *The Private Side of Public Education*; *Lessons for Leaders and Governing Boards*; *Crisis Management for Schools*; *Pandemic Planning*; *When Darkness Finds Light*; *Daily Wisdom and Inspiration*, and *The Psychology of School Climate*, which was published by Cambridge University Scholars in Great Britain.

The United States Department of Education and Department of Justice invited Dr. McGiboney to make a presentation to teams from 31 states about school climate and school improvement. He has written guest columns for magazines and newspapers, and he has been interviewed by CNN, NBC, CBS, ABC, and many regional and local television and radio affiliates. Also, he was featured in a bullying awareness program for children on the Nickelodeon Network and on an A&E television special on school violence. Additionally, Dr. McGiboney appeared in a United States Department of Education video production of Emergency Preparedness for Families that was broadcast on PBS and other networks.

Dr. McGiboney is the recipient of several awards, including NAACP Educator of the Year; the National Association of School Psychologists National Friend of Children Award; Georgia School Counselors Advocate of the Year Award; Georgia Association of School Nurses Hero Award; School Social Workers Association of Georgia Friend of Children Award; Mental Health America Board Member of the Year, and others. Dr. McGiboney was inducted into the Georgia Board of Regents Hall of Fame for his career-long efforts on behalf of children.

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prevention programs, and provision of technical assistance, guidance and support to local school districts and schools. As it relates to providing technical assistance and support, we do this in collaboration with other state agencies and stakeholders. Areas of focus include: school climate, school safety, school safety planning, prevention, protection, response, innovation, and recovery.

GPAD: How is the Office of School Safety and Climate organized?

McGiboney: There are two main divisions. Jason Byars is the program manager of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Division, and Cheryl Benefield is the program manager of the Safe and Supportive Schools Division. Your readers will probably recognize that both of these individuals were at some point involved in Project AWARE over the life of the project.

Then there's our Advisory Committee. By design, it is a highly diverse group covering GaDOE staff, other state agency staff and, of course, an assortment of key local school district personnel. The realization that school safety involves more than discipline meant that we had to assemble an advisory group composed of the types of professionals who handle a full range of safety and security issues, school climate, upstream prevention, and disaster recovery. Among our members are specialists in transportation, facilities, food safety, etc. I spend quite a bit of my time with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) examining safety issues that we weren't necessarily attuned to before now. I am especially appreciative to GEMA for providing one of their staff members to work with us on long-term assignment and for working so closely with us and local schools. GEMA's director, Homer Bryson, has embraced the importance of school safety and climate.

GPAD: In looking at the Office of School Safety and Climate's organizational chart, it seems that you have literally designed a system around existing programs that are at the heart of creating safe schools and positive school climate. How has the mental wellness and resilience focus of Project AWARE been integrated or subsumed?

McGiboney: In organizing the Office of School Safety and Climate it was important to bring all the separate, relevant programs together under one umbrella. In most instances, they were already talking to each other, but bringing them together will help to forge tighter connections around collaboration. Regarding the integration of Project AWARE, the core tools that emerged from the project have been deliberately linked to the PBIS framework. As you

know, PBIS has a whole child focus, promoting successful academic, social, emotional, and behavioral growth. From the beginning, we had imagined that this would become the natural home for the substance of Project AWARE. PBIS also has a huge focus on school climate. Using the resources of one of our new school climate transformation grants, which Rebecca Blanton manages, we intend to deploy our school climate specialists to help schools work on PBIS and school climate. A school can have a focus on school climate and not be utilizing the PBIS framework. We want all schools in Georgia to have a positive school climate, even if they are not yet implementing the PBIS framework.

GPAD: What important outcome do you anticipate Georgia's students, families and educators will derive in the short term because of the work of this Office?

McGiboney: The recent development of a comprehensive School Safety Plan template, in conjunction with GEMA, for all districts and schools, is an important early outcome. The school safety plan has long been a requirement. However, the contents of plans have tended to be more internally-focused and narrow. Given the enlightenment that we now have about what makes for a safe and secure internal and external environment, we saw an opportunity to support districts and schools in creating more proactive safety plans. Schools now have access to an extensive, evidence-based safety plan template to guide the development of their plans. Also, we have developed a comprehensive School Safety and Climate Resource Center webpage that includes many resources for schools and school districts.

GPAD: Seeing the Office of School Safety and Climate come into being and getting to head up its operations must mean a lot to you.

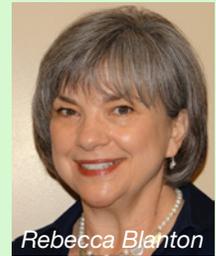
McGiboney: Absolutely! The Office reflects a culmination of the work that I've committed my professional career to over the years. The creation of this Office means that the work of school safety and school climate will continue long after I am gone. Now school climate has become part of education. It can be found in four places in the Georgia State statutes. There are school climate ratings associated with the CCRPI, which is every school's report card. Other state service systems, such as Juvenile Justice and DBHDD, are looking more closely at the role that school climate may contribute to attendance and other factors. We now have school climate as a major topic of conversations across systems. We have reached a place where some conversations are leading to powerful actions, like the creation of an office dedicated to school safety and climate in the broadest terms.

Message from the State Director of Georgia Project AWARE

Ending Well

By Rebecca Blanton, MA

By the time you receive this final issue of the Georgia Project AWARE Digest (GPAD), the federally-funded SAMSHA grant will have ended. The grant made many things possible for the three LEAs (Griffin-Spalding, Muscogee and Newton County School Systems) that served as our action labs for learning about how to promote children's mental wellness and resilience. Project AWARE LEAs were able to use the resources of the grant to convene core teams of stakeholders on a regular basis; purchase relevant evidence-based mental wellness and resiliency programs; access mental health professionals through direct hires or contract services; develop customized referral processes and platforms; implement best practices-based, universal mental wellness screening programs; and conduct 100s of hours of training with educators, parents, first responders and youth featuring a variety of topics. Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) was among the highly-rated training courses offered by the LEAs and members of our State Training Team. Over the life of the grant, nearly 6,100 First Aiders were trained, and the course was consistently rated an average of 4.5 or higher on a 5-point scale.



Rebecca Blanton

Although some of the tools and practices that the LEAs developed were similar, they were not cookie cutter by any stretch of the imagination. For example, there was customization of referral processes and universal screening programs. Yet, each LEA designed these systems of supports with their unique student and family populations in mind. Through collaboration and consultation with the Georgia Project AWARE Technical Assistance, Training and Evaluation Teams at Georgia State University, the three LEAs were able to build their systems using best practices. All implemented the PBIS framework at some level, but at varying numbers of schools. In Griffin-Spalding, Muscogee and Newton County School Systems, three different approaches emerged to promote children's mental wellness and resilience, and engage families and communities. Each has a story to tell that could help school districts fast track their journeys into tackling issues relating to children's mental wellbeing and resilience. If you are in a school district that is heading in this direction, I recommend that you ask the three Project AWARE LEAs about lessons learned.

Finally, many of you may be wondering, now what? I am pleased to tell you that Project AWARE is ending well in Georgia. The core concepts and tangible tools and practices spawned by Project AWARE will become embedded parts of the PBIS framework. And as you learn from the interview of Dr. Garry McGiboney, there are many 'off-shoots' of Project AWARE that will become parts of other initiatives. For one, some of our former Project AWARE staff will continue to have key roles in the new Office of School Safety and Climate. I have already assumed responsibilities for GaDOE's federal School Climate Transformation grant. In my role as manager, I look forward to seeing all the ways in which school climates are transformed to become a major protective factor for children's mental wellbeing.

Results of Mental Health First Aid Training

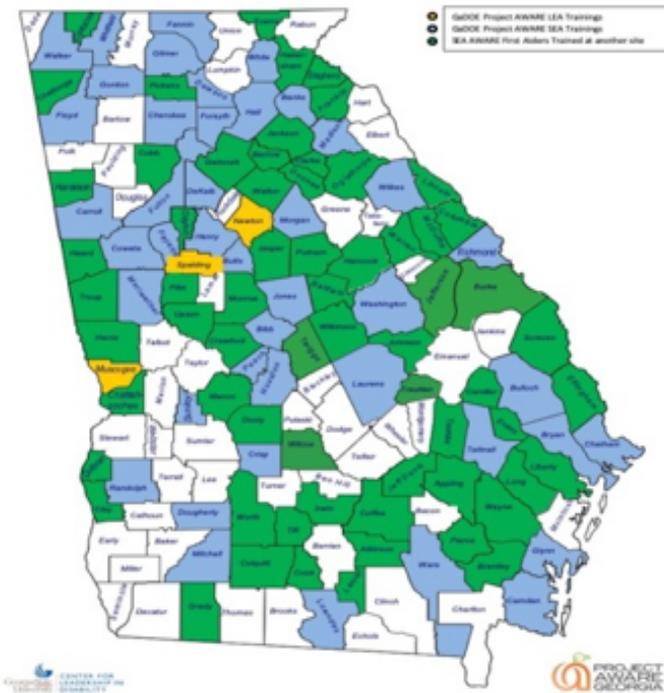
How Youth Mental Health First Aid is Used in Georgia's Schools

By Emily Graybill, PhD, Andrew T. Roach, PhD, Brian Barger, PhD, Ashley Salmon, MPH, Camara Gregory, MPH, Janay Tyler, MPH, & Jessica Barnett, MPH

Through Project AWARE, approximately 6,000 Georgia adults have been trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)

across the majority of Georgia's school districts (see map below). YMHFA is a day-long workshop that limits enrollment to a maximum of 30 individuals in each training session. It is considered the "gold standard" in mental health awareness training, with numerous publications supporting increased participant knowledge and confidence and decreased stigma post-training (e.g., Haggerty et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2019; Noltemeyer, 2019).

Georgia Project AWARE YMHFA Trainings



Brian Barger, Ashley Salmon, Camara Gregory, Emily Graybill

Andrew T. Roach

Janay Tyler

Jessica Barnett

The Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University (CLD-GSU) has collected data demonstrating the knowledge gain, confidence gain, and stigma reduction experienced by YMHFA participants, who are referred to as First Aiders. Georgia's First Aiders were surveyed about how they have used the YMHFA knowledge and strategies when interacting with youth in Georgia schools. Specifically, First Aiders were asked (1) How have you used the information learned in the YMHFA course? (2) Have you seen any schoolwide impact as a result of you and/or your colleagues attending a YMHFA training? and (3) Have you seen any changes in your students that you believe are the result of your and/or your colleagues' use of the skills learned in a YMHFA course?

Some highlights from Georgia First Aiders' responses are included in the lists below:

First Aiders reported improved interactions with students.

- The course reminds me to respect middle schoolers' mental health.
- Since taking the course a couple days ago, I find myself assessing the young men I work with with more compassion and insight.
- Changed my student interview to address more mental health areas.
- I have changed the way I deal with students who are distressed. I have learned it is ok for them to express their feelings and talk to me and I can offer help by giving them resources.

- I have used the course information to better serve my students, my own children and family members, and to know myself better. I have been able to better understand motivations behind the actions of students and have been able to recognize when myself and others are in need of mental health supports.

First Aiders reported that school discipline procedures have changed to consider the impact of mental health on behavior.

- We've been able to advocate more for holistic consequences rather than punitive measures.
- Yes, I'm not too quick to discipline as a first response to behavior issues. I try to understand why the child is acting out.
- First Aiders reported improved educator response during crisis situations.
- I had two students who told me they wanted to commit suicide and instead of panicking or feeling like I have to stop them, I had the tools to effectively handle the situation.
- I have used de-escalation techniques in my class to prevent/decrease a student's meltdown.
- I have used the information learned in the YMHFA course when talking with students who are at risk and need that go-to person. I am better able to recognize the signs and act accordingly in a timely manner. I have also learned how to keep myself in control when working with these students so that the situation is handled appropriately.

Results of Mental Health First Aid Training

First Aiders were more comfortable making referrals for youth or colleagues in need of mental health support.

- I have sharpened my observations of youth and recommended community mental health interventions when indicated.
- I have used this information to direct students/adults in distress to appropriate resources for help.

First Aiders shared YMHFA information and strategies with parents and teachers and other colleagues.

- I have educated parents in dealing with their children who have a mental disorder. I also have given strategies to teachers who have students with disorders in their classroom.
- I use it constantly in helping others to understand Mental Illness
- Recognizing the signs has helped me work with staff to help the students.

Students responded positively to the staff members' use of YMHFA strategies.

- My students are more open to coming to me for assistance.

I had two students who told me they wanted to commit suicide and instead of panicking or feeling like I have to stop them, I had the tools to effectively handle the situation.

- One student even willingly informed me that suicidal thoughts have stopped based on our interventions.
- Yes, students that I have spoken with one-on-one seem to be more open about what they are going through and will ask for help or space to talk when needed.
- The students have come back to say that they are using the skills to help them cope.
- Yes, students seem calmer and staff is building trust using the techniques from training.

This is only a small sample of the hundreds of responses we have received from Georgia First Aiders about how they are using the YMHFA skills and strategies in their work with youth. Mental health awareness training works and we at the CLD-GSU are grateful to have been a part of this statewide effort to bring free, evidence-based mental health awareness training into Georgia schools.

Youth Mental Health First Aid Training Finds Support in Local Mayor, Former Educator

Q&A with Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham, City of East Point, GA

How did you hear about Youth Mental Health First Aid training?

When I served as Director of Student Discipline, Prevention and Intervention of a metro Atlanta school district, I was a member of the team that received Youth Mental Health First Aid instructor training through Project AWARE. As a certified instructor, I re-delivered YMHFA training to others in the school district and community organizations.



Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham

What were some of the most compelling points that you learned about helping youth who may be at risk for mental health challenges?

It was very helpful to learn a common language that can be used to describe the mental health challenges that our youth face. Being able to identify signs and symptoms and, in turn, knowing how to connect youth to resources, were invaluable outcomes of becoming a certified instructor. I also learned how important it is to avoid stigmatizing young people who may be at risk for mental health challenges... to not rush to

But, it is my role to assess for risk of suicide or harm; listen nonjudgmentally; give reassurance and information; encourage appropriate professional help; and encourage self-help and other support strategies.

assign a label. The training emphasized normal adolescent behaviors compared to behaviors that might require mental health first aid. A clear takeaway for me was that, as a first aider, it's not my role to diagnose or treat mental health issues that youth may be experiencing. But, it is my role to assess for risk of suicide or harm; listen nonjudgmentally; give reassurance and information; encourage appropriate professional help; and encourage self-help and other support strategies.

How has your participation in the training impacted how you view the mental health needs of young people?

Having participated in Youth Mental Health First Aid training, I understand that youth and their families don't have to suffer in silence when it comes to getting help for mental health issues. YMHFA reaffirmed the importance of resiliency and that recovery is possible with the right supports. I am aware of the growing network of resources that families and communities can tap into to support the

Youth Mental Health First Aid training incorporates evidence-based practices that can be used to get local communities to better understand and support youth experiencing mental health challenges through a common language.

mental wellbeing of our youth. For example, there are a number of state and national hotlines that provide easy access to information and assistance.

Now that you are no longer working in a school district, how are you using your position as Mayor of the City of East Point to promote the mental health needs of youth?

I am really big on reaching out to our schools to find ways to partner on matters that affect children and youth in the twelve public schools within the City of East Point. During my tenure as Council member, I championed the creation of our Joint Learning Committee that works with local school leaders, for-profits, non-profits, faith-based and other community organizations to extend learning in out-of-school time and increase student and parent engagement. Through this committee, we seek to bridge the service gaps that exist within the community. I anticipate that there will be opportunities to provide Youth Mental Health First Aid training as a collaborative effort to some of our local agencies and providers.

Knowing the value of Youth Mental Health First Aid training, what advice would you give other mayors or gov-

ernment officials about incorporating YMHFA into their agendas?

As an elected government official, I believe that it's critically important that we find ways to meet the needs of all our residents, including youth. The more knowledge we have about how to support mental wellness and how to bridge service gaps for youth in our communities, the better prepared and equipped our youth will be. Youth Mental Health First Aid training incorporates evidence-based practices that can be used to get local communities to better understand and support youth experiencing mental health challenges through a common language. What better way than to have elected officials champion this cause?

About Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham

Deana Holiday Ingraham is Mayor of the City of East Point, Georgia. Her mayoral term runs from January 2018–December 2021. Prior to being elected the 34th mayor of East Point, she was a member of the City Council. In 2018, Mayor Holiday Ingraham was named one of "Atlanta's Top 100 Black Women of Influence."

During her first term in office as an elected official, she championed implementation of livable wages for City employees, financial literacy for youth, Golden Age Resource Fair for seniors and the creation of a Joint Learning Committee (JLC). The JLC brings together school leaders, city department heads, and leaders from public, private, and non-profit sectors to extend learning in out-of-school time, increase parent and youth engagement, and enhance workforce development. As Mayor, she championed East Point being designated as a "Welcoming City," and led the creation of "The Healthy Point Initiative" to increase healthy lifestyle choices of East Point residents, create a more active and connected community and provide greater access to health information and services. Additionally, she has launched the Mayor's Scholars Program, My Brother's and Sister's Keepers in The Point, and the Volunteering in the Point (VIP) Program.

Deana Holiday Ingraham received a B.S. degree from Florida A&M University in Business Administration and Accounting with a minor in Criminal Justice and Psychology, a J.D. degree from Howard University School of Law, and a M.S. degree in Criminal Justice with a specialty in Child Protection and Juvenile Justice from Nova Southeastern University. Mayor Ingraham is a Youth Mental Health First Aider.

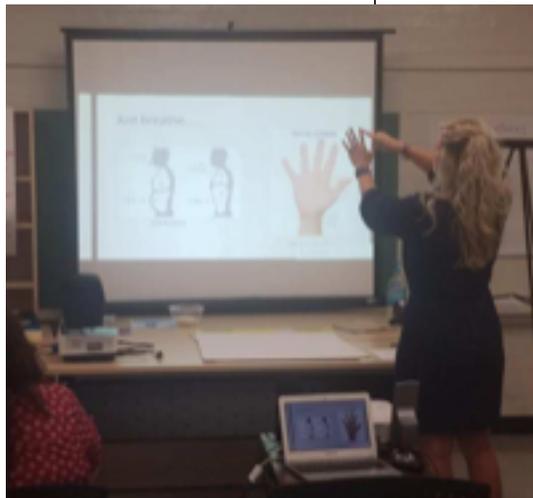
Griffin-Spalding Mental Wellness Progress

Griffin-Spalding School District – Still Growing our Children’s Mental Wellness Support System

By Rhonda Harris, LSW, Mental Health Clinician
Debbie Crisp, Interim Coordinator
Project AWARE
Griffin-Spalding County School District (GSCS)

MORE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONISTS HIRED AND TRAINED

Project AWARE and the School Climate Specialists are in the process of training five new Behavior Interventionists who will support Griffin-Spalding County elementary schools. Behavior Interventionists work with struggling students as well as teachers and counselors. In their first training on July 30th, they were trained in mindfulness, Zones of Regulation, safe spaces, breathing techniques, and how trauma affects the brain. Self-regulation was also one of the strategies heavily focused on because of the significant need for that skill in elementary students. Behavior Interventionists were also taught to collect data on students’ behaviors and how to teach replacement behaviors. They attended Youth Mental Health First Aid and CPI’s Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training. Project AWARE and the Climate Specialists will continue to have monthly trainings for behavior interventionists so that they can refine their skills. “Our goal is to provide them with resources and strategies to help students challenged by mental health issues,” said Dana Welch, Mental Health Clinician with Project AWARE. Ms. Welch added, “The hope is that the resources and training will be shared with teachers to help them connect with their students because we know that even one of these key relationships can be what students need to succeed.”



A FOCUS ON STUDENTS’ SELF-REGULATION

In order to provide students with mental health support and improve their social and emotional well-being, Griffin-Spalding Project AWARE has focused on the goal of enhancing self-regulation among students. In an effort to achieve this goal, sensory rooms have been set up in seven GSCS elementary schools. Teachers have also been encouraged to set up safe spaces in their classrooms. Sensory boxes were provided to teachers and school counselors, as well as training on how to use the boxes in their classrooms and school sensory rooms. In addition

Griffin-Spalding Mental Wellness Progress



RAY LIGHTNER/DAILY NEWS

Griffin-Spalding County Schools Project AWARE donated books to the Little Free Libraries. Pictured, from left, are Brett Bell, Debi Crisp from Project AWARE, GSCS Mental Health Clinician Rhonda Harris, Andrea Dunson of First National Bank, Jewel Walker Harps of Educational Prosperity Initiative and Deputy School Superintendent Dr. Kiawana Kennedy.

to the sensory rooms, students were granted access to a mindfulness tool called Inner Explorer. Inner Explorer is designed to help students and teachers decrease stress and increase performance. Both students and teachers benefit from using this program because the entire class participates. Inner Explorer consists of breathing and relaxation exercises, learning awareness of senses, using thought and emotion regulation, developing compassion and connection, and promoting social emotional learning.

Donation of Books on Mental Wellness to Spalding Collaborative's Little Free Libraries

Project AWARE Griffin donated 58 books to be placed in the 28 Little Free Libraries around town. The focus of the donated books is mental wellbeing in celebration of May as Mental Health Awareness Month. The books are new and geared to elementary age students. Donated books were part of Project AWARE Raising a Reader Program in

the Griffin-Spalding County School System. "We had books left over," explained Debbie L. Crisp from Project AWARE. After the books were given to each of the elementary school counselors, the remaining 58 were donated to the Little Free Libraries. The titles included "A Giving Tree," "An Awesome Book of Love," "Virginia Wolf," "The Rainbow Fish," "Chrysanthe-mum," "Elmer," "A Chair for My Mother," "Tops & Bottoms," and "Jamaica Louise James." Brett Bell — who leads the Little Free Libraries project for the Spalding Collaborative — thanked them for the books, which will be used to help supply books for the boxes. Andrea Dunson of First National Bank, the librarian for the Little Free Libraries, thanked Project AWARE for donations as well as volunteers from the Junior Guild who stock boxes and report back on inventory needs and repairs. Bell also thanked Homer Maddox, who has taken on keeping the boxes repaired. "We're committed to building and sustaining this program," Bell said.

Credit: This article first appeared in the Griffin Daily News.



Camp Hope — a Mental Wellness Summer Program for Students

Georgia HOPE and Murray County Schools Partner on Camp HOPE through their School-Based Mental Health Program

By Jenny Wilhoite, LAPC, M.Ed
 Director of School-Based
 Mental Health
 Georgia HOPE
 Therapist,
 Woodlawn Elementary School
 Chatsworth, Georgia



Georgia HOPE, in partnership with Murray County Schools, offered our second annual Camp HOPE. This therapeutic week-long day camp is provided for elementary-aged children in Murray County who have been identified as candidates for mental health treatment. In this “Heroes for HOPE” themed camp, children learned about choices that



can positively impact their lives, constructive ways of expressing feelings, and positive behaviors that can be used to cope with negative emotions. Camp HOPE's central theme, Heroes for HOPE, helps campers realize their own capacity to bring HOPE to themselves and others, thereby making them heroes in not only their eyes, but in the eyes of those around them. This year, Georgia HOPE assisted campers in designing and building a community garden at Woodlawn Elementary School. The primary goals of the project were to create something that offers sustainable impact while contributing to the community at large as well as to raise awareness of the importance of mental and physical wellness.

The local police departments were invited to join in the fun of building the community garden and to help our campers, families, and community see all the positive support that officers provide. Community outreach activities such as these are intended to break down negative perceptions across the board by involving all community stakeholders to work together for the common good. Also, Camp HOPE promoted the benefits of post-secondary education by providing seven local high school students the opportunity to be camp counselors, in return for work-service hours, reference letters, and college scholarships.

In addition to participation in the week-long camp, students received services through Georgia HOPE's School-Based Mental Health Program (SBMH). The SBMH Program provides year-round mental health treatment and support to children and their entire families. Through this program, Georgia HOPE also helps support schools in maintaining a climate that fosters positive social, behavioral, and emotional growth. You may view the highlights of Camp HOPE 2019, including work on the garden, by accessing this YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC9nnk3PPUE>.

Since beginning school-based services in Murray County in 2015, students enrolled for services have shown significant progress, including 74% improvement in attendance, 75% improvement in testing, 82% improvement in academic performance, and 85% reduction in disciplinary referrals. In the first year of providing SBMH services in Murray County, the suicide rate decreased by 80%. From year one to present, the number of students served has increased by 1,683.7%, which has resulted in a significant reduction in state dispatched mobile crisis teams, as well as less than 1% of children in the program being hospitalized.

Camp Hope — a Mental Wellness Summer Program for Students

WHO IS GEORGIA HOPE?

Georgia HOPE is a community-based provider of mental health, substance use, and family preservation services, that is committed to breaking down barriers to mental health treatment and increasing access to underserved individuals and families. The organization's core values are: Make a Way, Act for the Whole, and Cultivate Growth. Staff at Georgia HOPE literally meet the family where they are in order to engage them in services and assist with recovery. As an integrated care provider, Georgia HOPE focuses on the whole person, and is dedicated to wellness for individuals served. Recognizing the importance of engaging children in the school environment, Georgia HOPE has been a trailblazer in the school-based mental health services arena, starting in just two Murray County schools in 2015 with eight referrals. Today, Georgia HOPE's SBMH program provides clinicians to 100% of Murray County schools and serves over 700 students/

families in Murray County, alone. Georgia HOPE also provides school-based mental health services in eight other districts: Bartow, Catoosa, Floyd, Walker, Rome City, Gordon, Whitfield, and Lumpkin. Across all nine districts, services are provided in 58 schools. Georgia HOPE has utilized DBHDD Apex funding as seed money to create a sustainable model that can be implemented throughout the state. Georgia HOPE plans to continue to expand the School-Based Mental Health program to more districts and schools in the coming months.

Apart from Georgia HOPE's SBMH programming, the organization offers in home mental health and substance use services in 26 North Georgia counties. This complements Georgia HOPE's Social Services Division which offers family preservation services in all 159 counties in Georgia. To learn more about Georgia HOPE, please visit www.gahope.org.



Camp HOPE students and staff.



THE GEORGIA APEX PROGRAM: SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

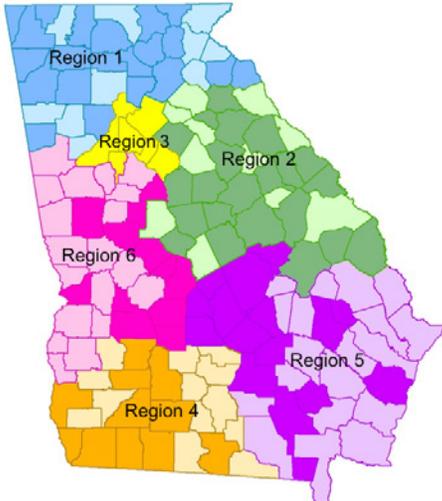
Year 3 | August 2017 to June 2018

Program Overview

The Georgia Apex Program, funded by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, creates partnerships between community-based mental health providers and local schools to provide school-based mental health services. The program began as a pilot in August 2015 and is now in its fourth year (academic year 2018-2019).

The program's goals include increasing *access* to mental health services for children and youth, providing *early detection* of child and adolescent mental health needs, and strengthening *coordination* between community-based mental health providers and local schools.

Georgia Apex Program Reach (Year 3)



Darker-shaded counties have at least one Apex school. As of June 2018, Apex was in 55% of Georgia counties and 56% of Georgia school districts.

Year 3 By the Numbers

- 29** funded providers
- 396** schools involved; **309** schools report engaged partnership*
- 27** average number of students served per school
- 288** average number of first-time students served per month
- 3,464** students received mental health services, who had not previously
- 15,536** referrals made for school-based mental health services
- 60,318** services provided in schools
- 95.9%** of parents surveyed reported being satisfied with the services their child received

*Engaged partnership is defined as three or more months of reported data.



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ANDREW YOUNG SCHOOL
OF POLICY STUDIES

Lessons Learned From Universal Screening of Mental Wellbeing

Four Years of Universal Mental Health Screening in Georgia's Schools:

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

By Emily Graybill, PhD, NCSP, Brian Barger, PhD, Andrew T. Roach, PhD, Quynh Wellons, M.Ed., Ashley Salmon, MPH, Camara Gregory, MPH, & Corey Jones, MPH

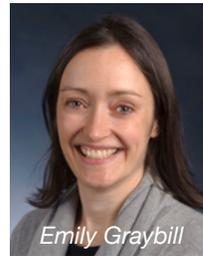
The three school districts participating in Georgia Project AWARE have been the trailblazers for helping us understand how to implement universal mental health screening in Georgia. We at the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University (CLD-GSU) have had the honor of guiding these districts through a step-by-step, evidence-informed universal screening process. In addition to providing educators with screening data to inform decisions about student supports, we at the CLD-GSU analyzed the screening data to help answer broader questions about universal mental health screening in schools. Here are some of the research questions we have asked and answered.

Question: Does student-reported universal mental health screening data identify students at risk for mental health concerns who would not otherwise be identified through discipline data?

Answer: Yes. In a sample of 1,735 middle school students in Georgia, students who rated themselves high on the screener's externalizing behavior subscale were more likely to have a high number of office discipline referrals (ODRs) by the end of the school year. Students who rated themselves high on the screener's internalizing behavior subscale were less likely to have a high number of ODRs by the end of the school year. This means that a middle school's ODR data are likely to help educators identify students with externalizing behaviors but the ODR data are unlikely to be useful for identifying students with internalizing concerns. Universal mental health screening is one of the few ways to systematically identify students who may be struggling silently with issues like anxiety or depression.

Question: Does teacher-reported universal mental health screening data identify students at risk for mental health concerns who would not otherwise be identified through discipline data?

Answer: Yes. In a sample of 1,201 elementary school students in Georgia, students rated high by their teachers on the externalizing behavior subscale were more likely to have



Emily Graybill



Brian Barger



Andrew T. Roach



Quynh Wellons



Ashley Salmon



Camara Gregory

a high number of ODRs by the end of the school year. Students rated high by their teachers on the internalizing behavior subscale had varied numbers of ODRs at the end of the school year. Some students who were rated high on the internalizing behavior subscale had high numbers of ODRs and some had low numbers of ODRs. This means that an elementary school's ODR data are likely helpful in identifying students with externalizing concerns but would only indicate some, but not all, students with internalizing concerns. Universal mental health screening provides elementary school teachers with a systematic way to identify students who may be struggling silently with issues like anxiety or depression.



Corey Jones

Question: Do different informants (e.g., teachers, students) and different screeners identify different students as at risk?

Answer: Yes. We examined screening results from 100 students in one high-achieving high school that conducted universal mental health screening using both a teacher-report screener and student-report screener. The results confirmed that teacher and student reporting, as well as different screening tools, will result in some different students being identified. The choice of informant and screening tools should be dependent on the needs and resources of the school.

Question: How do teachers feel about completing the universal mental health screener?

Lessons Learned From Universal Screening of Mental Wellbeing

Answer: According to a sample of 60 elementary school teachers in Georgia schools, the universal mental health screener is easy to use and the teachers see the importance of conducting screening to identify students who may be at risk for mental health concerns. More of the teachers would like to see the screening data used in a timely manner to help connect students to services. To ensure teacher buy in, schools interested in conducting universal mental health screening should make sure that the data collected is used efficiently and effectively.

Question: When teachers complete the universal mental health screener, do they rate students differently based on the student's race, gender, and grade?

Answer: Not in the dataset that we analyzed from Georgia schools. In a sample of 4,755 elementary school students in Georgia schools who were 48% female, 52% male, 47% African American, 39% White, 9% Hispanic and 6% Other or Mixed Races, 50% in K-2nd and 50% in 3rd-5th, there were minimal differences in teacher responses across the race, gender, and grade of the students. This means that teacher responses on the universal mental health screener were not significantly different based on the race, gender, or grade of the student. Mental health screeners exist that are not systematically biased regarding race, gender or grade, so schools may be confident that they are measuring the same concerns in different groups.

Review the CLD-GSU's website for additional information about implementing universal mental health screening. Contact Dr. Emily Graybill at egrabbill1@gsu.edu if your district is interested in implementing universal mental health screening.

Recommended Resources

School Mental Health Referral Pathways

Toolkit (SAMHSA): <http://files.ctctcdn.com/bde05f96001/84fa3636-08af-43fc-aeaf-a016f2aa68a6.pdf>

Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2019 (GPEE): http://www.gpee.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GPEE-Top-Ten-2019-Final_1-7-19.pdf.

Universal Screening Webinar (Roach and

Graybill): <https://www.gadoe.org/sites/SearchCenter/Pages/Results.aspx?k=Georgia%20Project%20AWARE#k=Georgia%20Project%20AWARE>

Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators: https://rems.ed.gov/docs/nctsn_childtraumatoolkitforeducators.pdf.

Helping Traumatized Children Learn: <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/>

School Climate Improvement Action

Guide for Working with Students: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/SCIRP/actionguidestudentwhole.pdf>

School Safety and Health Resources: <https://www.gadoe.org/schoolsafetyclimate/Pages/Title-IV-Additional-Information.aspx>.

New Smartphone App for Georgia Youth

in Crisis: <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/press-releases/2019-06-12/gov-kemp-state-leaders-announce-smartphone-app-youth-crisis>.

New Statewide Coalition Forms to Create Vision for an Integrated Behavioral Health System for Ages Birth Through 26 Year-Olds

Resilient Georgia is leading a statewide coalition to develop a closely aligned trauma-informed public and private network working toward a united vision to create a birth through 26-year-old integrated behavioral health system. Key components of the overall vision, to be implemented by a variety of partners, are advocacy; policy; prevention and intervention; research and system-of-care implementation and coordination; and the use of essential tools such as education/teaching/training, workforce development, and practical research and evaluation.

Interested in learning more? Email evall@resilientga.org to be added to the listserv and stay abreast of related events, activities and meetings. Emily Anne Vall, PhD, is Executive Director of Resilient Georgia.

Georgia's Focus on School Climate

Rating School Climate in Georgia: What's It All About?

WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The National School Climate Center defines school climate as “the quality and character of school life” that is based on the “patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experiences of school life.”[1] Research has found that schools with positive school climates tend to have better test scores and graduation rates; in contrast, schools with negative school climates as a result of unsafe or hostile environments tend to have lower academic performance.[2]

A sustainable, positive school climate supports people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. In a positive school climate people are engaged and respected. By contrast, disruptive and aggressive behavior such as threats, bullying, teasing and harassment creates a hostile school environment that interferes with academic performance. A hostile school environment fosters increased absenteeism and truancy because students feel unsafe at school. If a child is not physically and mentally in attendance, learning cannot take place.

1. **National School Climate Center.** (2014). School Climate. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/>.
2. **Thapa, Amrit, Jonathan Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro.** 2013. “A Review of School Climate Research.” *Review of Educational Research* 83(3): 357-385.

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL CLIMATE STAR RATING?

In response to the compelling body of research that underscores the importance of school climate, Georgia was the first state in the nation to include school climate as an early indicator in its academic accountability system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). State law (O.C.G.A. § 20-14-33) requires the development and use of a “star rating” to address school climate. The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to school improvement.

HOW IS THE SCHOOL CLIMATE STAR RATING CALCULATED?

The School Climate Star Rating is calculated using data from the Georgia Student Health Survey, Georgia School Personnel Survey, Georgia Parent Survey, student discipline data and attendance records for students, teachers, staff and administrators. The School Climate Star Rating provides school-level data on the following components:

1. Survey – a measure of student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate;
2. Student Discipline – a measure of student discipline using a weighted suspension rate;
3. Safe and Substance-Free Learning Environment – school discipline incidents and student survey responses on use of illegal substances and the prevalence of violence, bullying, and unsafe incidents within a school; and
4. Attendance – the average daily attendance of teachers, administrators, and staff members and the percentage of students with less than six unexcused absences.

Each of the components is given equal value.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL CLIMATE STAR RATING MEAN?

Each school receives a 1-5 star rating, with five stars representing an excellent school climate, and one star representing a school climate most in need of improvement. Schools have access to a comprehensive report which allows them to identify areas in need of improvement, and plan targeted student interventions to improve achievement for all students.

Source: Adapted from Georgia Department of Education's School Climate webpages. Accessed at: <https://www.gadoe.org/schoolsafetyclimate/Pages/School-Climate.aspx> and <https://www.gadoe.org/schoolsafetyclimate/Pages/School-Climate-Star-Rating.aspx>.

Muscogee County Project AWARE — Looking Forward

Muscogee County School District's Project AWARE: Looking Back While Moving Full-Speed Ahead

By Courtney Lamar MS, NCC, BCC, PBP

School Mental Health Coordinator
Project AWARE
Muscogee County School District



Courtney Lamar

Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) is near the end of its five-year federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The grant was awarded to Muscogee County School District by the Georgia Department of Education in September 2014. Muscogee County School District is one of three school districts in Georgia, along with Griffin-Spalding and Newton County, chosen to receive the grant.

Accepting the grant meant that our district would be committed to: 1) reducing the stigma associated with children having mental health problems; 2) creating access to behavioral and mental healthcare for children and youth; and 3) collaborating with community partners and schools to create systems of support for children and their families.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS PAVE THE WAY

One of the first action steps that Project AWARE Muscogee undertook was the development of a Core Team. The Core Team consisted of a diverse group of community members and district support staff. One of its first tasks was to develop Vision and Mission statements to anchor the focus of the project and goals and objectives to guide the work. The Core Team met monthly during the first year and was instrumental in helping to identify community resources. As Project AWARE Muscogee grew, so did its needs. The Core Team eventually morphed into the District and Community Leadership Team providing consolidated information sharing and planning to address the mental wellness of children. The Core Team's engagement in the initial phase of Project AWARE Muscogee's work laid the foundation for significant community and provider involvement throughout the duration of the project.

Over the years Project AWARE Muscogee collaborated with numerous community agencies and groups to en-

hance public education about children's mental and behavioral health issues. One of our major collaborating partners is Project LAUNCH, a group committed to doing similar work as Project AWARE Muscogee. Project LAUNCH's focus is on children ages prenatal to 8 with an emphasis on early identification of social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral concerns. Per parents' consent, Project LAUNCH has supported children in Muscogee County's Pre-K programs by providing screenings and connecting parents to resources needed by their children. Project AWARE and Project LAUNCH have also collaborated on trainings for educators on behavioral management in the classroom, health fairs for the community and reading initiatives. Notably, Muscogee County was the first in the nation to be a recipient of both Project AWARE and Project LAUNCH grants over the same duration. This made it possible for the formation of a unique collaboration between a K-12 school district and an early childhood program concerning the full continuum of children's mental and behavioral health needs.

Project AWARE also collaborated with the Local Interagency Planning Team (LIPT) in Region VI. The collaboration with LIPT allowed parents to present their concerns before a group of child-serving organizations/therapeutic providers to find ways to connect with resources. LIPT does not charge for linking youth to services. All therapeutic providers/organizations that participate with LIPT accept Medicaid as well as other types of insurance making it possible for most parents/guardians to access services. Region Six LIPT has been especially helpful to many of the students and families of Muscogee County School District.

TAKING PBIS TRAINING TO SCALE

As of August 2019 personnel at all 54 schools and three centers in Muscogee County School District have been trained on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). It was one of the many goals set from the beginning of the grant. At times this goal appeared impossible to meet. Nevertheless, with the support of the District Superintendent, District School Board, the Cabinet and School Leadership Teams, the goal was met. This means that all of Muscogee County Schools and centers have made the commitment to:

- Improve their school's climate by working together to build a positive environment for students to feel connected, safe, and respected thereby increasing student engagement.

Muscogee County Project AWARE — Looking Forward

- Improve their school's culture by utilizing evidence-based approaches to teaching social and emotional practices and academics.
- Diminish office discipline referrals and school suspensions by observing restorative and trauma-informed practices to engage students and support the needs of the student while diminishing the negative behaviors.
- Increase instructional time and provide differentiated learning opportunities.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (YMHFA) TRAINING PROVIDED IN COHORTS

Project AWARE Muscogee has provided YMHFA training in cohorts in order to systematically roll out training across the district. Rothschild Leadership Academy was the first school in the district to have its entire faculty trained as part of preplanning and professional development. Another cohort trained within the district was the Transportation Department. It is the priority of the Transportation Department to safely and efficiently transport the students of Muscogee County to and from school. Last year the Transportation Director scheduled time for over 100 Bus Drivers and Bus Monitors to be trained on YMHFA as part of their professional development. For every cohort that was certified, there are now groups of young people getting the support of a First Aider.

APEX SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES COMING SOON

The provision of behavioral health services in schools through APEX is an initiative that is still pending Board approval. Upon board approval APEX is slated to service three to four schools, providing children with resources for behavioral health. The resources will include therapeutic services for students, as well as professional development trainings for faculty and staff. The APEX provider in Muscogee County is New Horizons Community Service Board. New Horizons is also one of our community partners.

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER (SBHC) ENTERS PHASE 2

Project AWARE Muscogee is pleased to lead the charge in developing the second School-Based Health Center (SBHC) in Muscogee County School District. Dorothy Height Elementary School and Valley Healthcare System Inc. are working closely to customize the SBHC to meet the behavioral and

mental health and medical needs of students. The district looks forward to sustaining the collaboration between the two entities as we have entered into Phase 2 of the planning and development process of the SBHC at Dorothy Height.

Project AWARE Team Pinpoints Proudest Accomplishments

THE VOICES OF MCSD PROJECT AWARE: WHAT MEANINGFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF WHEN IT COMES TO PROJECT AWARE?

Dr. Kenya Gilmore joined the team as the Director in 2017. She hit the ground running managing an assortment of projects, such as guiding Cohort 5 schools through PBIS training and managing a team of four people. She is a real track star going for the gold. Here's what she's most proud of:



"I would have to say it is that we have gotten all 57 Muscogee County School District (MCSD) schools/centers trained in school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) due to Project AWARE resources. Getting MCSD school staff to view behavior as something we can predict given the right resources, something we can influence with the explicit teaching of behavioral expectations, and as something we can improve with appropriate intervention is key to PBIS as a multi-tiered system of support for students. This has started some real conversations about behavioral interventions and mental health supports for students. It has caused teachers and administrators to pause and examine if their approach to discipline is proactive and restorative rather than reactive and punitive. It has caused a significant shift in thinking in our district and I am honored to be a part of it."

Michelle Pate joined Project AWARE Muscogee in 2016. Michelle brings strong technical skills and innate understanding to the work. Her passion to support students'



Muscogee County Project AWARE — Looking Forward

social, emotional and behavioral skills was apparent in the many tasks that she managed daily (i.e., Management of Facebook page, survey development, interpretation of data and translating into layman's terms, etc.). Michelle's greatest accomplishment is cited below:

"As a project manager for the development of the online mental health tracker, in collaboration with our Technology Department, we developed a mental health online tracker system built within our current student information platform. It allows counselors to track their services as well as referrals made to community or school-based mental health providers. The tracker has a built-in reminder function that notifies the counselors every two weeks, asking them to follow up to ensure that students receive services. The tracker will remind the counselors until the referral is closed. Our team was also responsible for training counselors in our district on how to use the platform. Many of the counselors trained expressed how much they liked it and how easy it is to use."

Connie Smith, the Administration Assistant for Project AWARE Muscogee, joined the team in 2016. She is often referred to as the glue that keeps everything together (and the team as well). Her ability to multi-task and manage minute details for several projects that are taking place simultaneously is impressive. Connie says:



"I am most proud of the FREE Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification Course that is offered to not only all of the employees of the Muscogee County School District but also to the general community. As a Youth Mental Health First Aid Logistics Coordinator it has been my passion to organize these trainings. This past year Project AWARE/PBIS had the opportunity to train over 100 bus drivers who are sometimes the first persons the students see when they leave home. It was very heartwarming to witness the participants have a paradigm shift when they realized that some of the youth in their lives were not acting up just to be disorderly, but because they may be in crisis. With behavioral health becoming more of an issue, this course teaches the participants a 5-step action plan on how to support young people in crisis and in non-crisis situations.

As a bonus to participants of the YMHFA training, those who complete the training are eligible to obtain certification as a First Aider. I have helped make the training possible by procuring the rooms for training, enrolling the participants in the course if they were not able to do so on their own, and sending out confirmation notices about the class. I make sure that all of the necessary paperwork (sign-in sheet, pre-test, post-test, evaluation, and quiz) is prepared and distributed to the group at the appropriate time. I also set up the training room and arranged it according to specifications. To keep the group motivated, I also provide refreshments with a smile."

Dr. Nikki Sutton joined the team in 2017, managing the charge of creating a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. She is an excellent asset to the team, as she adds ingenuity, creativity, and energy.



"I am most proud of and most grateful for the beginning shift in mindsets across our district from 'reactive' to 'proactive' practices that yield significant benefits for student outcomes. While we as a district are still a work in progress, some schools have begun the work of using universal screening data and other data sources to develop tiered supports to address children's behavioral and social/emotional needs. More importantly, there is an interest in understanding a progressive discipline approach to ensure tiered supports are available to all students."

Courtney Lamar joined the team in 2015. "I am most proud and grateful for the opportunity to help create access to behavioral health supports for families and their children. It has also been a pleasure to link schools to resources within the community. Most importantly, I am proud that I have been able to empower adults who support our children with information that increases their ability to make empathetic and trauma-informed decisions for children."



Muscogee County Project AWARE — Looking Forward

Final Thoughts from Project AWARE Muscogee

Overall, it has been a peach-pleasing experience to be a part of this initiative. Thank you, GaDOE, for all of your support, guidance, and resources granted to us over the grant period! You have been awesome!

Project AWARE will continue because we have only just begun the work. Our focus continues to be on meeting the needs of our students right where they are. We will continue to collaborate with community partners; increase equitable access to coordinated mental health services for children, youth, and their families; and expand and improve mental health supports within an integrated and multi-tiered behavioral framework. The needs of our students have no expiration date; therefore, our work has no expiration date. We will continue to work diligently in the field to support the whole child and develop productive citizens!



Project AWARE Muscogee Team: Back Row: Dr. Nikki Sutton, Front Row: Left to Right: Courtney Lamar, Michelle Pate, Dr. Kenya Gilmore and Connie Smith



State Interagency Stakeholders discuss Project AWARE sustainability during work session.



Signing-Off: Georgia Project AWARE LEAs and State Education Agency Reveal Key Sustainability Plans

During a Stakeholders' Sustainability meeting, representatives of GaDOE (the State Education Agency) and LEAs receiving grants (Griffin-Spalding, Muscogee and Newton County School Systems) provided an overview of their major Project AWARE sustainability efforts as federal funding ends.

SEA	Griffin-Spalding	Muscogee	Newton
Continue implementation of YMHFA training using state trainers/instructors	Promote children's mental health through presentations at conferences	Create Department of Prevention and Intervention Services by merging Project AWARE and MTSS programs; will have five staff	On board PBIS at remaining schools; 75% of schools now use the PBIS framework
Increase the number of YMHFA trainers/instructors at the state level	Engage in community education and outreach	Sustain universal screening program; 81% of students have been screened to date	Implement Sources of Strength curriculum in middle schools as funding permits
Support universal screening in new districts in collaboration with GSU (Dr. Emily Graybill)	Continue to conduct universal screening of children's mental wellbeing	School district has added YMHFA training to its electronic platform to continue access to training	Continue YMHFA training with school staff
Make available webinars on behavioral and emotional risk screening (internalizing and externalizing behaviors) to be produced by GSU (Dr. Emily Graybill)	Continue to provide YMHFA training for school personnel and community	Bring 100% of schools on board with PBIS by training remaining seven schools	Continue mental wellness film series for students and families
Continue to publish Georgia Project AWARE Digest through the end of the grant to address mental health stigma issues	Develop mental wellness policy and procedures	Implement a new partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters in the area of mentoring	Refine universal screening program and continue to implement
Complete resource manual and make available to LEAs	Continue to make mental health clinicians available to consult with teachers and school administrators about students' mental wellbeing	Finalize and implement additional Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for school-based mental health services	Retain Project AWARE staff
	Explore the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to bring additional mental health services into the schools		
	Continue monitoring of students' technology use for signs of mental wellness issues		
	Maintain services of the two mental health clinicians		

Georgia Project AWARE Vision, Mission & Goals

What is Georgia Project AWARE?

GEORGIA PROJECT AWARE IS A SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (SAMHSA) FUNDED YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE. AWARE STANDS FOR ADVANCING WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE EDUCATION.

VISION

School-aged youth in Georgia experience social and emotional wellness in educational settings through integrated systems of behavioral and mental health.

MISSION

The mission of Project AWARE is to build and expand the capacity of school and community partnerships to coordinate and integrate systems of behavioral and mental health services for Georgia's school-aged youth.

GOALS

- To increase awareness of mental health issues among school-aged youth.
- To provide training for school personnel and other adults who interact with school-aged youth to detect and respond to mental health issues in children and young adults
- To connect children, youth, and families who may have behavioral health issues with appropriate services.

Georgia Project AWARE Team

State Project Director: Rebecca Blanton

LEAs

Muscogee: Kenya Gilmore, GPA Manager/Coordinator; Courtney Lamar, Mental Health Coordinator; Connie Smith, Administrative Assistant; Dr. Nikki Sutton, Coordinator, MTSS; and Michelle Pate, Technical Assistant.

Newton: Adrienne Boisson, Manager/Coordinator; Christopher "Chris" Williams, Assistant Project Coordinator; Naran Houck-Butler, Mental Health Clinician; and Cindy Leiva, Administrative Assistant.

Griffin- Spalding: Debbie Crisp, Assistant Coordinator; Rhonda Harris, Mental Health Clinician; and Dana Welch, Mental Health Clinician.

Evaluation Team (Georgia State University): Drs. Joel Meyers, Kris Varjas & Ken Rice.

State Training Team (Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability): Dr. Emily Graybill, Dr. Catherine Perkins, Cirleen DeBlaere & Breanna Kell.

Disclaimer: The views, policies, and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Georgia Department of Education. Any mention of products, programs or resources should not be viewed as an endorsement.

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