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MHRB Highlights School Programs During National Prevention Week
State dollars provided additional funding for prevention programming in schools

SPRINGFIELD, OH (May 12, 2021) – It’s never too early to prevent mental health and substance use problems, and Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene & Madison Counties (MHRB) focuses on prevention early in life – in part by working with local school districts to implement evidence-based prevention (EBP) programming. In other words, practices that we know work.

National Prevention Week is observed annually to increase public awareness and action around mental health and substance use disorders. During National Prevention Week, which is observed May 9-15 this year, MHRB is highlighting the different ways schools in Clark, Greene & Madison Counties are working to keep kids and their communities healthy.

Last May, Gov. DeWine’s administration launched the K-12 Prevention Education Initiative, a collaborative effort between the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to distribute \$18 million to support prevention education for students grades K-12. School districts in Clark, Greene & Madison Counties will be able to fund existing and new EBP programming. Since then, MHRB facilitated the distribution of \$319,615 across 19 school districts and organizations in its three-county area.

“The earlier we can develop resiliency and reduce risk factors that contribute to the development of mental health and substance use concerns, the healthier our families, schools and communities will be in the long term,” said Dr. Greta Mayer, CEO of MHRB. “MHRB identified prevention leaders in each county who have been working to reinforce the idea that community mental health readiness begins in schools – and we are seeing that schools are welcoming this sort of programming. State funding through the K-12 Prevention Education Initiative gave existing programs a much-needed boost, and we’re eager to invest and reach many more students who will be able to benefit from direct mental health support services in the classroom.”

Under the K-12 Prevention Education Initiative, schools worked collaboratively with MHRB to determine their individual plans, which were tailored to meet the specific needs of each school. Here are some of the ways the funding was implemented locally:

Evidenced-based prevention works in Madison County

London City School District was one of the first to jump on board with the K-12 Prevention Education Initiative, investing in Panorama Well-Being Surveys to measure students’ wellness

and mental health. Panorama is an evidence-based screening tool that assesses school climate using student, teacher, administrator and parent feedback. The screening tool is customizable around a core set of base questions, and the resulting data is analyzed to determine students' emotional environment at different levels: individual classroom, grade, building and district. Teachers then are given suggested tools or interventions to incorporate into their teaching to address areas where students need additional support.

The K-12 funding was critical in allowing the school district to prioritize mental health resources for its students, according to Melissa Canney, student support specialist at London City School District. As a result, it has helped the district have more conversations about social-emotional learning (SEL) than ever before.

“Since receiving the funding last year and implementing Panorama surveys in classrooms, our students are reflecting on themselves, their competencies and they are also reflecting on their school and its environment. The data we receive will enable staff to begin to explore what we can do to improve and strengthen our services,” said Canney.

A ‘whole child’ focus in Greene County

Since 2019, Wright State University’s Whole Child Project has worked to reduce health and mental health problems that impact K-12 students’ education. The project dovetails with the Ohio Department of Education’s strategic plan aimed at educating “the whole child” beyond reading and math. In Greene County, five school districts were part of the initial project, facilitated by Wright State University and national consultants. Additional funding from K-12 Prevention Education Initiative allowed two districts to continue participating for a second year.

For many districts, participation in the Whole Child Project marked the first time this type of holistic wellness assessment could be performed, creating useful discussions throughout the county and region. As a result, Greene County school districts were able to assess and invest in prevention resources for the staff and students in each district collaboratively with prevention expertise from the Greene Educational Service Center (Greene ESC) and MHRB.

“This funding has enhanced the capacity to understand the importance of prevention by investing in training for teachers, staff and administrators. In doing so, we're building a greater understanding of prevention and the entire continuum of care. For the five districts who participated over the two years, it has created district-level Whole Child Advisory Teams for planning and implementing prevention strategies,” said Amanda Castro, prevention and wellness project manager for Greene ESC.

“We'd like people to know that the more we invest in early prevention and intervention the greater impact on not only students' success in school, but throughout their lifespans, positively impacting our community as a whole. In order to educate students, we need to address the whole child, including early childhood mental health, alcohol, tobacco and other drug education, social emotional learning and continued mental health services,” said Emily Magoteaux, alcohol tobacco other drug prevention specialist for Greene ESC.

Youth lead the way in Clark County

In Clark County, K-12 Prevention Education funding is boosting existing student-led initiatives that allow youth to take the lead in shaping the wellness of their communities. Bringing Awareness to Students (BATS), a youth-led organization using data-driven strategies to make a positive difference, was founded last year by a group of Springfield High School students who were participating in Botvin LifeSkills® Training (LST). Botvin LST is a research-validated substance abuse prevention program proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote starting to use substances or engage in other risky behaviors.

Thanks to the additional funding from the state, Botvin LST will be implemented at two additional schools in the district. Beth Dixon, prevention education coordinator at WellSpring, is the adult ally for BATS and is optimistic about the impact Botvin LST will have on students in the district.

“The big thing that I love about Botvin is that it’s not like D.A.R.E. – it’s not a drug prevention program. It’s grounded in teaching kids self-regulation and it’s done in units in self-esteem, goal setting, decision making and how to be assertive. It’s exciting and interactive. The kids are engaged in the learning process and interacting with the curriculum as you’re teaching them,” said Dixon. “Our hope is to engage schools in creating youth-led programs as an extension to the work they’re doing through the Botvin curriculum.”

As other schools begin implementing Botvin this fall, BATS at Springfield High School continues to grow and make waves both locally and across the state. On May 5, Dina Rulli-Healey, a Springfield High sophomore and co-founder of BATS, was awarded the Youth Prevention Award by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Association of Ohio (ADAPAO) during its virtual Youth Prevention Showcase. And ads designed for BATS’ anti-vaping campaign will be appearing on the Clark County Health District’s social media pages and in print throughout Springfield.

For more information about mental health and substance use resources in Clark, Greene and Madison counties, please visit the MHRB website at www.mhrb.org.

ABOUT MHRB

Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene & Madison Counties (MHRB) assists partners, stakeholders, residents, and anyone at risk of mental health or substance use concerns in our three-county area, providing pathways to mental health and addiction services. In collaboration with more than 20 care providers, the board advocates for the mental health needs and facilitates delivery of quality care for all ages, regardless of income or ability to pay.

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