

Project Cal-Well: A 5-Year Journey (2014-2019)

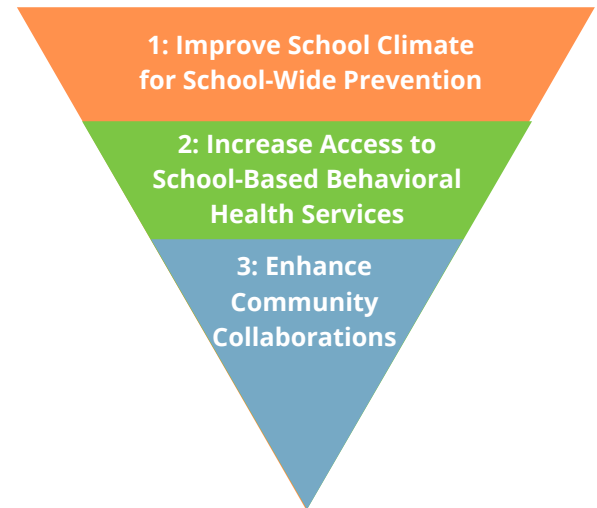


The California Department of Education (CDE) is committed to increasing mental health services to support the socio-emotional well-being of all students. In 2014, CDE was awarded a five-year Federal grant to implement Project Cal-Well statewide and in partnership with three Local Education Agencies (LEAs): Garden Grove Unified School District, ABC Unified School District, and San Diego County Office of Education.

The mission is to increase awareness of and improve mental health and wellness of California's students, and provide training for school personnel to detect and respond to mental health issues.

This brief describes the Project Cal-Well model and provides highlights of successes and lessons learned over five years of implementation.

Project Cal-Well Three Component Model



Component 1: School Climate

To create school climates that promote healthy socio-emotional development and well-being for ALL students

Key interventions include Suicide Prevention Policies, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Trauma-Informed Practices, Restorative Practices, Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA), and National Alliance on Mental Health Illness (NAMI) on Campus High School (NCHS) Clubs.

Suicide Prevention Policies

Passed in 2016, Assembly Bill 2246 requires secondary schools to have suicide prevention, intervention, and post-vention policies in place.

The percentage of school staff reporting that their schools had these policies and they had put the policy into practice doubled over the course of the grant, from 13% to 26%.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

An 8-hour training to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental distress or illness. Reviews adolescent development and common youth mental health challenges.

"It was extremely valuable for our staff in identifying the social emotional needs of our students and providing them with a systematic way to refer students for additional support."
- Training participant

NAMI on Campus High School Clubs

Trained students to launch high school clubs that raise mental health awareness and reduce stigma through peer-led activities and education.

"My favorite thing about the training was being able to freely talk about mental illness without scrutiny."
- Student participant



5,987

Individuals trained in YMHFA by CDE and LEA partners

7,877

Youth referred to mental health services by YMHFA instructors and First Aiders

4,033

School staff trained by LEA partners on mental health topics

118

NAMI on Campus High School Clubs established statewide

Component 2: School-Based Mental Health Services

To increase access to school-based individual and group mental health (SBMH) services

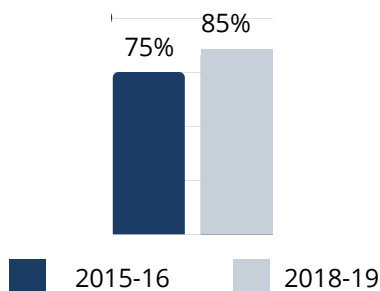
Students with mental health needs are more likely to receive services when they are offered in school than in the community. Project Cal-Well schools hired a range of providers, including credentialed and licensed providers to support students in need.

6,754

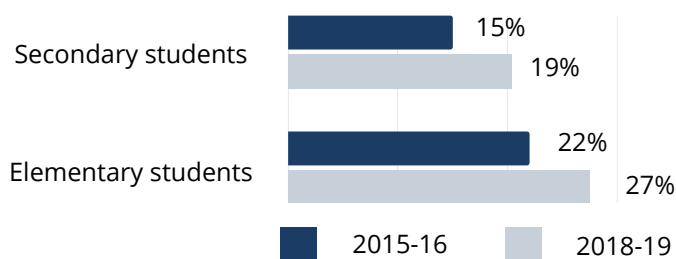
Students were provided SBMH services in 2018-19, an increase of 154% from 2,664 in 2013-14



More school staff reported that they referred students to SBMH professionals in the past 12 months



More students reported that they would seek help from a counselor, doctor, or therapist if scared, stressed, or depressed

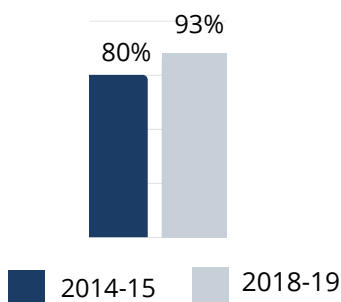


Component 3: Community Partnerships

To build partnerships and cross-system collaborations to promote youth well-being and access to community-based services

Component 3 focuses on providing intensive mental health interventions to students with mental health needs through strong community collaborations. Schools work closely with community-based behavioral health organizations to develop referral pathways to ensure students receive needed interventions.

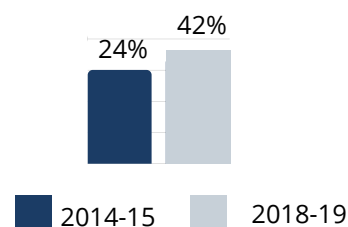
Project Cal-Well LEAs reported increased behavioral health service referrals resulting in services being provided in the community



93%

Of mental health service referrals for school-aged youth resulted in services being provided in the community

An increased percentage of school staff in Project Cal-Well schools reported that they referred students to community-based mental health services



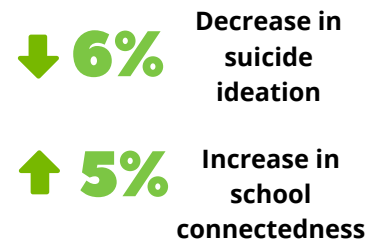
Project Cal-Well Cohort 1 Local Education Agencies: 2014-2019 Highlights

Garden Grove Unified School District

- **Implemented** PBIS, Restorative Practices, Mindfulness Practices, Suicide Prevention, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs and Second Step pilot
- **Hired** Psychologist Interns, School Psychologists and School Social Workers
- **Increased** capacity to refer and provide school and community-based counseling to students through expanded community partnerships



Over the course of the grant, 9th grade student outcomes improved:

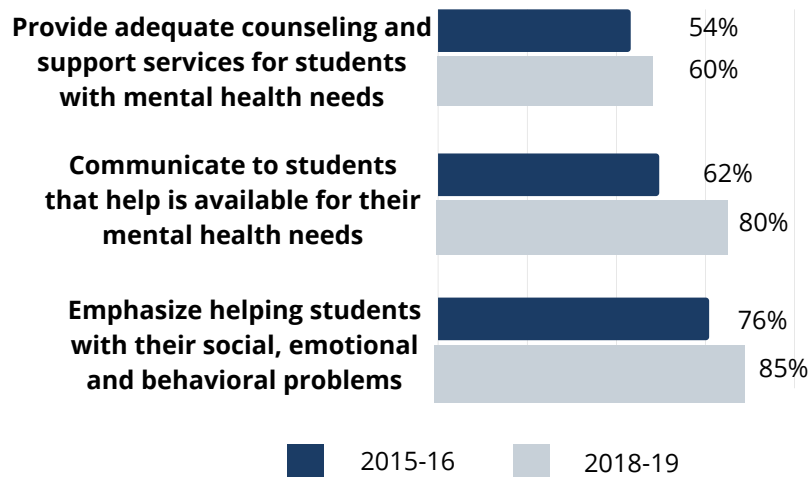


ABC Unified School District



- **Implemented** PBIS, Socio-Emotional Learning Curricula, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs, Trauma-Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention.
- **Hired** Mental Health Professionals and School Social Workers
- **Developed** a Community Resource Team partnership of local social service and mental health agencies

Over the course of the grant, more school staff reported that their schools:



San Diego County Office of Education

- **Implemented** PBIS, Socio-Emotional Learning Curricula, Mental Health Trainings for Staff, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs, Trauma-Informed Practices, Restorative Practices, School-Wide Information Systems, and training in youth suicide prevention, intervention and postvention
- **Recruited** and placed graduate level counseling interns/staff in schools
- **Developed** a comprehensive trauma-informed suicide risk assessment toolkit to help districts to move from policy to practice in their schools

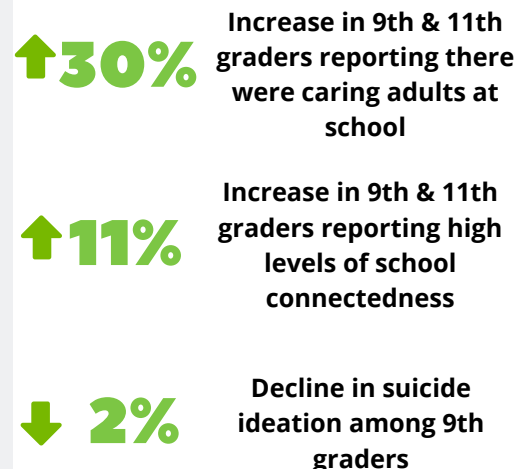
6,725

Staff from 42 school districts and charter schools trained on mental health and wellness, positive school climate and trauma-informed care

2,550

Youth referred to a mental health service by YMHFA trained adults

Over the course of the grant:



Key Lessons Learned

Launching and Implementing Project Cal-Well

- Engage and obtain buy-in from school and district leadership
- Clarify expectations school-wide
- Assess and support staff wellness
- Recruit part-time providers or graduate level mental health interns as a pilot
- Provide ongoing support and coaching to project leads and mental health professionals
- Create formal screening and referral processes to identify and serve students in need
- Identify and establish formal partnerships with community-based organizations to refer and support students in need

Ensuring Sustainability

- Create ownership by offering schools choices in the selection of evidence-based strategies
- Hire in-house mental health staff to build district infrastructure
- Integrate Project Cal-Well goals with district policies, goals, or existing initiatives
- Capitalize on district Local Control and Accountability Plan to braid funding
- Share success stories widely to capitalize on and promote value of the program



Looking Forward

Expanding the Reach: CDE was awarded a new Federal grant to implement Project Cal-Well in Northern California, in partnership with Humboldt, Sacramento, and Stanislaus County Offices of Education from 2019-2024 (Cohort 2).



The first cohort of Project Cal-Well was funded by a five-year (2014–19) “Now Is The Time” Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to the California Department of Education. The University of California, San Francisco School Health Services Research & Evaluation Team evaluated the project and produced this report: <https://healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/school-health-services-evaluation>.