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Spartan Connections

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“Spartan Connections: Developing peer mentorships for freshman success”

Seaside High School is located on the Central Coast of California and is home to 1,119 students. *Bullying has many negative effects on high school students.* Some consequences of bullying are suicide, depression and anxiety, and increased likelihood of dropouts. At Seaside High School, a survey was conducted to see if there was a need for a peer mentor program. After analyzing 136 responses from the freshmen and sophomore class, *64.7% of the respondents said they would benefit from having a peer mentor show them around the school and help them out with classes.* Another question that was asked on the survey was to describe the first week of Freshman year. Responses included “lost,” “painful,” and “*It sucked because I had no friends.*” Seaside High School is introducing a new program named Spartan Connections that trains senior teacher assistants in the counseling office on how to talk to and mentor the freshmen class. *Spartan Connections* gives an opportunity for seniors to lead and guide incoming freshmen through a successful high school experience. As an intern through the CHHS program at CSUMB, bringing this program to Seaside High has *developed competency in leadership toward health promotion and anti-bullying.*

AGENCY AND COMMUNITY SERVED

Seaside High School is located in Seaside, California and has been operating since September 1963. It is home to 1,119 students who come from all over the Monterey Peninsula. Those students are from the ages of 13 to 18 and are from grades 9th through 12th. 64% of the students are low income and 61% are Hispanic, 11% White, 10% African American and 10% other.

Seaside High School's mission statement is, "Through dynamic, engaging learning experiences and collaborative partnerships within our diverse Coastal community, the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District ensures that each student will attain the intellectual, social and personal knowledge to passionately seek the challenges of the future" (2017). There are many programs Seaside High School has to offer but the ones that have to do with intervention & support are these that are listed: Seminar 4 success, READ 180, APEX credit recovery and short term independent study. Seaside High School shapes their students to become hard working individuals that will better their community.

PROBLEM, ISSUE OR NEED

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Lack of education on bullying
- Students have a lack of support
- Insecurities of adolescents

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are high rates of bullying at Seaside High School.

CONSEQUENCES

- Drop outs
- depression/anxiety
- suicide

The amount of bullying cases at Seaside High School are too high. Bullying is when someone uses superior strength or influence to intimidate (someone), typically to force him or her to do what one wants. There are four main types of bullying; physical, verbal, social and

cyber. An example of physical bullying is hitting, kicking, pinching or damaging ones' property. Verbal bullying is when one insults, teases or verbally abuses another individual. Social bullying becomes more relevant in high school and that is when one spreads rumors, embarrasses and humiliates or damages ones' social reputation. Cyber bullying is also very common in high school. Cyber bullying is when somebody says hurtful things via text, email, posts on social media, images and/or videos. With the rise of social media, cyber bullying has become prevalent with younger generations.

Contributing Factors

One contributing factor to the high rates of bullying is the lack of education on bullying. Most students do not know the severity of bullying and how their actions could jeopardize one on their peer lives. Teachers need to be more aware of what is happening in the classroom and build that trust with their students so their students will feel comfortable going to them about a problem. Educating the students all starts with educating the teachers on the red flags of when somebody is getting bullied and what protocol is. If teachers will be able to recognize and acknowledge if one of their students is getting bullied, they will be able to assist both students and can refer them both to counseling to further investigate the situation.

Another contributing factor to the high rates of bullying is lack of support. Most of the time, students are scared to go to teachers and faculty because they are scared that the teacher is going to rat them out to the bullies, which will make matters worse. As a teacher, it is important to build trust early on with every student so that if anyone runs into trouble, they will feel comfortable enough to seek help. Another aspect to this is educating students on what resources are available to them. A lot of high schoolers cannot even find where the counseling department

is or what they do. So, when a student does run into trouble, they may not know what to do so they will keep it bottled inside which can lead to a serious consequence.

The last contributing factor to the rise of bullying is insecurities of high schoolers (the bullies specifically). When looking at a bullying case, there is so much focus on the victim but a lot of the focus should actually go to bully. According to Dan Olweus, a Norwegian psychologist states that, “-the tough and aggressive bullies are basically anxious and insecure individuals who use bullying as a means of compensating for poor self-esteem” (2018). A lot of bullies are acting out due to their own problems. Most of the time, they pick on kids that are easy target and they get a feeling of relief by bullying. It is important to let bullies know that what they are doing is under no circumstance okay and to possibly refer them to a psychologist for get some further Consequences

The switch over to high school can be the hardest transition for a young adolescent. According to the Boomerang Project, “Numerous studies show that the transition to high school is marked by a period of emotional stress and discomfort for adolescents, often times resulting in a decrease in academic achievement and an increasingly difficult social adjustment” (2011). Studies show that if you fail your freshman year, there is a good chance you will not finish high school. So, by bringing Spartan Connections into Seaside High School, this program will break that stigma of freshman year and be a helping hand to those who are about to embark on the high school journey. Throughout a young adolescent’s journey through high school, studies have found that freshmen have the highest number of dropouts.

Another consequence of bullying is depression and anxiety. According to Dr. Andre Sourander, a professor of child psychiatry, he states that, “children who are bullied in early childhood have an increased risk of depressive disorders and need psychiatric treatment later in

life” (2018). When children and young adolescents get bullied, the side effects that come from this act stick with them until adulthood and can cause major mental health issues, especially depression and anxiety.

The last consequence for bullying is suicide. Suicide related behaviors include; suicide, suicide attempt and suicide ideation. Due to the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that come from bullying, the risk of suicide is at a much higher rate. Suicide among youth (15 to 24 years old) reported for 20% of annual deaths (CDC, 2012). The transition to high school is hard enough just on its own. Adding the factor of bullying to your high school transition can make it unbearable and that is where a lot of youth feel like there is no other option besides suicide.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The capstone project that is implemented at Seaside High School is ‘Spartan Connections.’ This program is implemented in the counseling office and the services Spartan Connections will be providing are geared towards helping out the lower classmen. At Seaside High School, seniors get the choice to be a Teacher’s Assistant for a classroom or the counseling department. The counseling department has roughly two seniors per period who help out with the daily office duties as well as a new one recently added. Those who are teacher assistants are a part of Spartan Connections. These mentors are trained on how to speak to the students they meet with and other important communication skills such as I statements, non-verbal communication and empathy. Spartan Connections gives an opportunity for seniors to lead and guide incoming freshmen through a successful and fun high school experience.

There are many benefits from having this program implemented in Seaside High School. One of the benefits from this program will be less bullying situations. Working in the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) department, there have been a great number of

students saying that a classmate is bullying them. The rates of bullying at Seaside High School are too high. By having this program implemented, students will be given a chance to have another advocate when they do not feel comfortable going to an adult to tell them when they are getting bullied. This is a huge benefit for students, both the mentors and the mentees, because they are able to seek help and the mentors are able to assist them with whatever they need. Another huge benefit from this program is being able to bridge the gap between upper and lower classmen. At most high schools, there is a division between who is a freshman and sophomore and who is a junior and senior. By building this program, freshman will get to know their upperclassmen and build relationships between each other as well as learn from each other. Another benefit from this program is building leaders among our young people. Leadership is a great skill to have and by implementing this program, students will get the opportunity to work on this skill at an early age. The last great benefit from being in this program is that it looks great on a college resume. Colleges love to see students involved in their school as well as the community so having this program to put down on a resume or application will help tremendously.

Spartan Connections has been implemented into the 2018-2019 school year and will be a yearlong process. Starting at a new school and being in a wide range of new classes, freshman year can be a stressful and intimidating life event every adolescent goes through. According to an article written by Michele Willens “more students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out.” So, by adding Spartan Connections into Seaside High School, the hope is to not only reduce the rates of bullying but build a sense of belonging and inclusion especially within the

freshmen class. Another hope for Spartan Connections is to give freshmen the knowledge about where to get help if needed and who is available to meet with them.

In July, there was a meeting held between two counselors as well as myself and we talked through what this program would look like and our goal for it. The counselors thought that this would be a great stepping stone for a bigger program such as Link Crew that could be built into the school later on. In August, the students were picked to be Teacher Assistant's and were asked if they would also like to be a part of Spartan Connections. Everyone except for a few agreed and the first meeting was held to talk about what this program is about and how they are going to be able to help other students in need. There was a curriculum developed and every week this is what the mentors talk about in their meeting so that they can implement it when they are meeting with their freshmen.

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines
Speak with counselors about Spartan Connections	Start the curriculum	July 27 th
Create post survey	Google forms for the survey	August 25 th
Talk to teachers about giving survey in their class	In person meetings	September 14 th
Hand out post surveys via email	Send mass email to Freshmen class	October 1 st
Talk with mentor about last minute activities	In person meetings	October 13 th

PROJECT RESULTS

For the result of Spartan Connections, the goals I made for this program were met. Although this program did not go the way I have envisioned it, I came up with the idea of lower classmen students having an upperclassmen student to talk to and this program does just that. My thought on this project was to have it as a class high school students can take for credit but the school had a better idea for it to be implemented. The counselors decided to take the lead on it and make this program through the counseling department. I was disappointed that I was not able to be more apart of this project but it was a great learning lesson. I also was not able to get the results I wanted in paper form because I did not receive enough responses to my post survey. So, unfortunately I was not able to get the results that I wanted but I was able to hear from the students who got these services and from the senior teacher assistants. I thought this was a great learning lesson because the school system is constantly fluctuating year after year. If one class is bought in to filling out a survey, the next lass may not be so that is why it is important to learn students' needs and desires every year.

The strength of my project would have to be the project design. I developed this project based off of my own personal reflection and my experiences navigating through my high school years. I was lucky enough to go through high school with a strong friend group because I was involved in a sport. The question I asked myself when starting this program was, "What about the kids who aren't involved in a team sport? Or band? Or some type of club?" I started this program to give students a chance to build new relationships and to bridge that freshmen senior gap. My hopes starting this program was to give students another peer to talk to and I would say

I succeeded with that. This is one of the biggest transitions an adolescent can go through so by giving them these resources, they will have a smoother transition.

The biggest challenge I faced in my internship was the lack of support. In October I was able to send a pre-survey out to the freshmen class successfully and when I tried to do the same thing this past semester I did not get the same reaction to my survey. My first one, I was able to get 136 responses and this past survey I sent out I only got 5. I asked multiple people about distributing it in their classroom and sent emails after emails but no staff members got back to me. It was disappointing to see the involvement the staff gave which was little to none. So yes, there is a pro to this situation because I was able to see where there was a lack of support in Seaside High School and I was able to come up with a program that would support these student's needs.

CONCLUSION

I do believe that Spartan Connections should be continued at Seaside High School. I think there are many benefits that the students can gain from having this program in the curriculum. I think something that could be done differently if it were to be continued would be to start the process earlier. We waited until a few weeks before school started to get the ball rolling. I think the recruitment process should start in the Spring semester so the soon to be seniors can get their training in.

I also believe that there should be more talk in the counseling department about how we can prevent bullying. There are a lot of bullying cases that happen at Seaside High School and the school does not know about more than half of them. Students have a fear of seeking help when it comes to cases like this so I think there should be more talk about how students need to find help when they are getting bullied. A great idea to address this issue may be to have the

seniors come up with a lecture and they can go to different classes to talk about this issue. This gives them more experience with public speaking and they can become experts on this subject.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

This experience was a terrific way to find out what I want to do and do not want to do with my life. Seaside High School has a foundation and culture that has been dated back all the way 1960's and it was an honor getting to be a part of it.

I thought my project was kind of a rollercoaster. When it started off, I was able to get many people on board and then when it hit the end of the year, everyone kind of backed out and I was the only one left. Luckily, two counselors contacted me letting me know how much they liked my project and wanted to do more with it. I let them take it over while I still can be a part of it. My only problem with my project is that I feel I am not in it as much as I would like to be.

The huge social problem I am addressing with Spartan Connections is the lack of inclusiveness and bullying. Spartan Connections gives seniors the opportunity to lead incoming Freshmen and give them a person to talk to. This also gives Freshmen the chance to let the student counselors know if they are being bullied.

Some advice that I would give to future capstone students that work at Seaside High School is to not to work alone. Building a program takes a village and you need all the resources you can get. I also would tell them to get involved with the school and buy in to the philosophy. I also would tell them to not rush the process. I think the one mistake I had with my capstone is that I rushed this great idea when I should have gotten to know the culture more. I feel like starting out my first semester, I was able to get a general sense of what makes up Seaside High School but I jumped to conclusions. If I would have studied the staff and students more, I would

have realized that there is a lack of support from the faculty so I may not have tried to start a program from the ground up but maybe build off of a program that has been up and running

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Appendix

Spartan Connections Pre Survey

Form description

What grade are you in?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other...

Have you ever been bullied?

- Yes
- No

Do you know who your counselor is?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you feel supported by Seaside High School's staff/faculty?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

What kind of support are you in need of the most?

- Academic (ex: struggling in classes)
- Social (ex: bullying, not feeling connected to peers)
- Personal (ex: problems at home)
- Other

If you chose 'other', please describe below

Long answer text

Are you willing to reach out to a peer for additional support?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not likely Very likely

I feel like I belong amongst my peers.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree