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## Care and Compassion

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Care and Compassion

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### **Abstract**

Many students who struggle with behavioral and mental health issues have a difficult time succeeding in school. Harden Middle School's Wellness Center is where students struggling with socioemotional, mental, and behavioral health can come to receive support. The Care & Compassion program was created to address students who have more than five F's or a zero-grade point average (GPA) and are failing classes at a high rate. A lack of parental and student engagement in distance learning, as well as depression due to isolation caused students to fall behind, fail classes and increased mental health concerns. Therefore, the Care & Compassion team used the Wraparound approach in creating individual plans for families with students struggling underperforming academically due to mental and behavioral health. The data demonstrates the positive impact returning to school had on the students grades and attendance. It also shows the developed relationship parents now have with the school, a reduction in F's, and increased attendance.

*Keywords: Mental health, isolation, wraparound*

**Agency & Communities Served**

Wellness Centers for the Salinas High Unified School Districts have been created to provide safe, supportive environments for students. Harden Middle School the first middle school in the Salinas Union High School District with a fully developed Wellness Center. Their school consists of 1223 seventh and eighth grade students, 91 percent of the students being Hispanic, 3 percent being White, 2.5 percent Filipino, and 1.4 percent African American. A total of 77.8 percent of students at Harden Middle School are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 30 percent are English learners, 12.8 percent of students have a disability, and one percent is in foster youth (California School Dashboard, 2021). Therefore, their mission statement states, “Harden Middle School Wellness Center is a caring environment that supports all students, staff, and families through building social-emotional services, establishing effective communication, and supporting academic achievement” (2020). They meet their mission by providing both on-campus programs and community-based partnerships to students and families in need of coordinated health education, assessment counseling and many other resources that can upturn the commitment and success of students.

All students at Harden Middle School are assessed and categorized by their need of assistance; to do so the intervention specialist must use a multi-tiered system of support to meet the students needs. Tier 1 of PBIS is a universal support system for all students, tier 2 targets the students who are at risk and tier 3 provides individualized support for the few students with intensive and persistent challenges. Eighty to ninety percent of students fall into Tier 1; students

who are categorized into this tier are usually the ones who are having homework issues or friendship distress. Tier 2 consists of five to ten percent of students, those students are getting into fights and have become truant due to absences. The intervention specialist, guidance counselor and school social worker all work together to assist students in Tier 2. One to five percent of students fall into Tier 3, they are the students in need of crisis intervention and are supported by the school psychologist and social worker as well as community-based programs (J. Roland, personal communication, March 28, 2021). All students at Harden Middle School are supported by someone at all times.

### **Problem Description**

Coronavirus has had a major impact on students, the pandemic has created issues never considered. Distant learning has heightened academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional problems among many of the Harden Middle School students and families. Many students from low-income households and who are also a part of minority groups are in need of mental health services through their school. Students with behavioral disorders as well as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) are likely to suffer psychologically and academically during distance learning (Stringer,2020). Many of those students struggle with those difficulties while attending school, adding a barrier like distance learning is putting them at a greater academic disadvantage. The problems students are facing are leading to academic difficulties, causing students to fail classes at a high rate leaving them with grade point averages (GPA) of zero. Evidence has shown that students who are failing are more likely to drop out of school, and adults who don't have a high school education are often limited to economic opportunities.

Additionally, students who fail in school are more likely to engage in health-impairing behavior, experience poor health, and die at a younger age (Byrd, 2005, P.2). Therefore, the Wellness Center at Harden Middle School has developed the Care & Compassion Team, which focuses on assisting students in families in receiving the support needed to succeed in school.

### **Contributing Factors**

#### **Depression due to social isolation**

In certain circumstances teens prefer to isolate themselves to prevent discomfort in social situations. Withdrawing from those situations at times leads to social anxiety or mental health challenges, which can cause depression. However, social isolation due to shelter in place is much different. Students who in the past would not have faced mental health challenges are now experiencing symptoms. The Center for Promise at America's Promise Alliance recently conducted a nationally representative survey of 3,300 students between the ages of 13-19. The study concluded that one-third of students were feeling unhappy or depressed in the last few months and don't feel connected to classmates or their teachers (2020, p. 1). This means that students who are socially isolated from family and friends during this time may be experiencing feelings of loneliness which are contributing to mental health challenges.

#### **Lack of parent engagement**

Parent engagement is crucial to a student's success in school. Parents who are engaged in their children's school life can promote positive education and positive health behaviors among adolescents. Studies have shown the connection between parental involvement and academic achievement. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, students who have

parental engagement in their school lives are more likely to get better grades, enhance social skills and have better behavior. Additionally, students are less likely to become pregnant, be emotionally distressed and avoid drugs and alcohol (2019). Parental involvement is an important factor to those students struggling with behavioral and mental health issues in a virtual learning environment. However, the lack of parental involvement in remote learning could be associated with economic resources, technology awareness, or lack of internet access. There are many factors that can contribute to the lack of parental engagement but it is important to understand that without it students are more likely to have poor social skills, low academic success, and exhibit bad behavior.

### **Engagement of online learning**

Online learning has taken a major turning point last year due to the Coronavirus pandemic. While some students have thrived in an online learning setting many are finding it challenging to be fully engaged in this style of learning. Students are struggling in many ways; some students may be attending class but not participating or turning work in. According to the American Psychological Association, kids are not used to learning in isolation. In classrooms students are able to work in groups, ask peers for help, and discuss lessons with others in the moment. For many students relationships at school inspire motivation in the classrooms (Stringer,2020). Many of the students are lacking the one on one interaction with their peers and teachers, potentially impacting the development of fundamental social emotional skills. When interacting one on one with others they learn how to pick up on social cues such as how others

are feeling, when someone needs help, and when to apologize. Students are not the only ones being impacted by the effects of the pandemic, but so are parents. The pandemic has caused economic recession, and social discontent; families are now dealing with financial worries, illness, loss, homelessness, and/or food insecurity making it difficult for the student to focus and engage in learning. “Trauma and stress both interrupt cognitive processing, reduce students’ executive functioning skill, and disrupt emotional regulation which makes it difficult to learn, think and engage meaningfully” (Morin, 2020). Students may not have the support or motivation to be engaged in school while participating in distance learning. Not working alongside a friend or having the confidence to ask a question over Zoom is influencing a student's engagement in class.

## **Consequences**

### **Grade retention**

Students who are failing classes are at risk of being held back. Grade retention has a major negative impact on a student's academic success. Grade retention has a profound influence on a student’s socialization, self-esteem, and behavioral issues. Research over the years has determined that there is a high correlation between retention and dropping out of school; grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout. Students who are retained also have an increased risk for health compromising behaviors such as emotional distress, drug abuse, suicidal intentions, and violent behavior. Retention also decreases the likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education programs which can affect student’s financial

instability as adults (National Association of School Psychologists, 2021). Schools using retention as a way of addressing the instructional loss through distance learning could worsen the existing inequalities in educational achievements and opportunities. Failing classes now can have irreversible consequences on student lives as adults, especially students from minority and low-income backgrounds who have been disproportionately affected by the impact of Covid-19 in academics. .

### **Credit Recovery**

Credit recovery programs are makeup courses that give students who failed a class an opportunity to get back on track to graduate without retaking the whole course. Students are able to complete a semester of classes in a matter of a few weeks. These programs help students receive their diploma, yet some studies have shown that students in credit recovery are not actually learning the content they missed (Heinrich, Carolyn, Darling, 2020). What school stakeholders aren't considering is the stress they are putting on students who are already struggling to meet expectations quickly. Most credit recovery programs give little to no teacher assistance leaving students to complete work on their own. Resulting in graduating students to leave school unprepared for life after graduation.

### **Mental health concerns**

Anxiety and depression are the leading mental health issues among children and adolescents. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center, suggests that depression is connected to lower grade point average as well as dropping out of school (2021). Some students have a

difficult time grasping new concepts over Zoom, and begin to lose motivation when assignments become overwhelming, causing stress and anxiety. Yet, 80 percent of children with a diagnosable anxiety disorder and 60 percent of kids with diagnosable depression are not getting treated for their disorder (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2021). For many students, the lack of social interaction can lead to feelings of isolation causing them to fall deeper into depression. With students already suffering with mental health they can feel trapped in a non ending cycle of stress, anxiety, and depression. For those who have never experienced issues with mental health, online learning can awaken those feelings.

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Depression due to isolation	Students are failing classes at an higher rate	Students are left back
Lack of parent engagement in student academics		Grade retention
Students are not engaged in online learning		Mental health concerns

### **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

#### **Capstone Project & Project Purpose**

The Care & Compassion program addresses the students who have more than 5 F's or a zero-grade point average (GPA) and are failing classes at a high rate. The students that have been selected to be a part of the program are dealing with behavioral challenges, mental health issues, financial disparities. The Care & Compassion team is using the Wraparound Implementation when creating individual plans for students with the support from their parents. Many of the students on the Care & Compassion list had sufficiently good grades before the 2020-21 school

year. It became alarming when several of those students began failing classes they used to excel in. Students seemed to have lost interest in school and weren't engaging in online learning. The students who were chosen for the project were also not receiving much parental support causing them to not engage in online learning while they were home. These factors contributed to the development of the project that was created to support the students who were underperforming academically and who showed behavioral changes since distance learning began. With the goal of improving grade retention, mental health concerns and assisting those students who could possibly be left behind.

### **Project Implementation**

After the first quarter of the 2020-21 school year it was apparent that there were students who were struggling academically. Therefore the Care & Compassion project was created and approved by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) Tier 2 team. The team consisted of the school social worker, intervention specialist, school counselor, and C&C case manager. The team met once a week to discuss the progress and challenges of the 60 C&C students. The school secretary was in charge of scheduling the students' family meetings; at least three meetings were held a week until the team met with most of the families. The C&C case manager was in charge of updating student's academic and attendance data weekly and notify parents about changes in participation, behavior, grades, and attendance.

The services provided by the C&C team came in four phases: team engagement and preparation, initial plan development, implementation, and transition. The intervention specialist initiated the meeting and was responsible for facilitating the meetings. The social worker was there to offer support on how to develop and implement the plan and to offer outside resources if

needed. The school counselor, and case manager present resources available at school, for example: homework club, tutorial, and one on one sessions with the teacher. The team worked in collaboration with the families in creating realistic goals that both parents and students were able to work towards to improve the students participation, behavior and grades.

The project was easily implemented since the Tier 2 team already existed and had funds available. The C&C case manager was the only addition to the team. All materials and resources were accessible and available through the different team members in the Wellness Center.

The case manager was responsible for contacting all parents on a weekly basis with feedback on their students' weekly progress. Every Tuesday the case manager reported back to the Tier 2 team on what students needed in regards to mental health, behavioral issues, academic assistance and would refer them to the proper resource. Grade and attendance were checked weekly if a student was excelling praise was given to both parents and student. This was done until the end of the school year. The project continued through the following school year and focused more on meeting with the students who continued at Harden. The goal was to have the least amount of students as possible on the C&C list.

### **Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes**

The effectiveness of this project was measured weekly and inputted into the C&C Excel sheet; the case manager updated grades and attendance to determine the participation of the student. Parents were also asked weekly on the effectiveness of the goals and visions set the previous week. The results were documents on the C&C Excel sheet. The plan was for at least 90 percent of the students and families to participate in the program. The goal was for 30 of the students with more than 6 F's to improve those F's to at least D's or lower the amount of F's to

less than 4. In order to improve the grades the students' attendance had to improve significantly. The C&C case manager planned on working closely with the parents and students to encourage the students to attend and participate in class .

### **Project Justification**

Wraparound is a process that focuses on putting the child or youth and their families needs at the center of the solution. According to the National Wraparound Initiative, “Youth people in Wraparound tend to have better outcomes than similar young people who don't receive Wraparound. Wraparound, across different areas of their lives including mental health, and functioning in their homes, schools and communities” (2019). The Wraparound process is different for every individual. The process is individualized to the child and families needs; support and services are based on their goals, desires, and build upon family values, culture and beliefs (National Wraparound Initiative, 2019). With the guidance of the team the family and child take the lead in deciding what services and support would best help them achieve their goals. Since distance learning began, families have not been as engaged in their child's education and the students have lost interest in participating in school. Therefore, the Wraparound approach through C&C creates better care for students and their families. It works to bring community resources, parent and school resources together to create a customized plan for the student to help him/her succeed academically, mentally and emotionally.

### **Project Activities**

Over the course of 6 months most of the program activities mentioned in the scope of work were conducted. The unprecedented circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic affected the overall implementation process of the program activities. Therefore the project proposal,

attending meetings with parents and presenting and analyzing data were activities that were executed successfully over Zoom. Meeting weekly with the Tier 2 team was beneficial to the beginning phases of the C&C program. During the meetings participants for the project were identified with the help of the school counselors, topics and data of students were analyzed by the Tier 2 team; meetings with parents were scheduled over Zoom. Gathering weekly data became challenging due to inability to access the school system during the pandemic. Therefore not much data was collected in the fourth school quarter of 2020-2021. Contacting parents and students was also a challenge during this time since students weren't as accessible as they were during the 2021-2022 school year; when most data was collected. Once the 2021-2022 school year began the case manager was able to meet personally with the students onsite making it easier to complete the weekly check ins, and collect weekly attendance and grade data. Overall the pandemic created many challenges that affected the proposed plan for the project. The program started to run efficiently once schools reopened. .

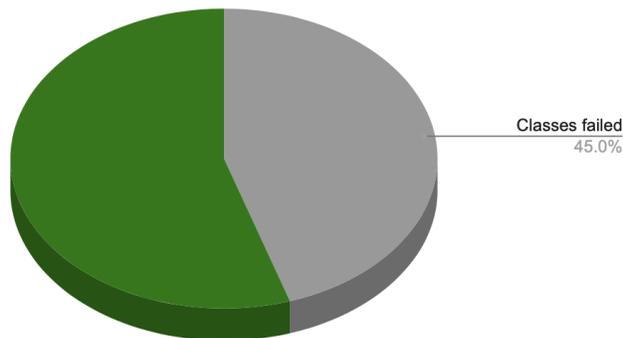
### **Project Outcomes**

By the end of the first 2021-2022 quarter it was concluded that most of the students of the C&C program had less than 5 F's and showed improvement in their attendance. Though the C&C program exceeded the Tier 2 teams' expectations, most of the success had to do with students returning to school and socializing again. Students were attending all 6 periods, 5 times a week unlike during distance learning when they had 3 classes a day and not attending them. Many of the students were excelling in their core classes; classes that they were failing during distance learning. Student's behavior improved upon their return to school demonstrating the struggles they faced while isolating.

## Results

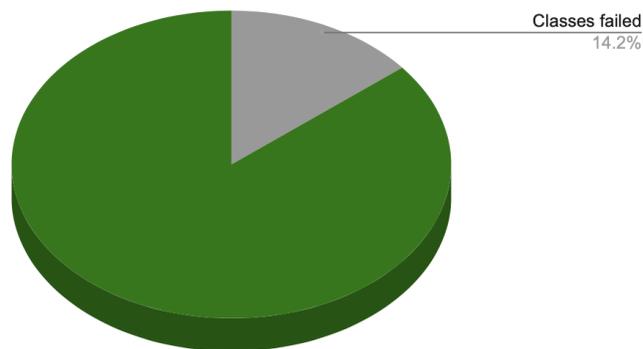
The project's results are based on the data collected from the 4th quarter of 2020-21 and compared to the first quarter grades of 2021-22. The data for all 20 students was tracked weekly on an Excel sheet. Once the quarters were completed the data was imputed into a pie chart for a visual representation of how the students did finish the quarter. The data compares the gap in grades of students when participating in distance learning versus when they returned to in-person school. During the 2020-21 fourth quarter students took three classes a day compared to six when they returned to school for the 2021-22 school year. Figure 1 shows data on 20 C&C students who were failing 45 percent of their classes during the 4th quarter. Figure 2 shows that at the end of the 2021-22 first quarter students had improved significantly and were only failing by 14.2 percent.

2020-21 Q4 Classes Failed vs Not Failed



*Figure 1: Classes Failed Q4*

2021-22 Q1 Classes Failed vs Not Failed



*Figure 2: Classes Failed Q1*

Overall the project did achieve its expected outcome; all C&C students improved their attendance, and had less than 5 Fs. The data shows the difference of the C&C program from the 4th quarter to the 1st. However, what helped the program succeed was the return of students to school after being away from in person education for more than a year. Once they returned to school the previous Wraparound approaches were implemented to the C&C students. It is clear that returning to school benefited all the student's grades and attendance; however, it is not clear if the C&C program added to the success of the grades improving.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

It is evident the effect the pandemic had on the students at Harden Middle School. Many of the families struggled with their students having behavioral, academic and mental health challenges during the 2020-2021 school year. Using the Wraparound approach the C&C case manager provided resources for families in efforts to better support their students from home. There weren't improvements in grades in 2020-21, the students began to show improvement the

1st quarter of 2021-22 school year. Overall it is difficult to determine whether C&C program contributed to the students' academic success upon their return to school.

Based on the findings of this program it is recommended that the C&C program continues to collect data on the students with a high number of Fs. It is suggested to continue weekly check-ins with parents and students to maintain the open relationships with the C&C case manager .Overall this program could be extremely beneficial to students and families if it had more structure. It is suggested that the program develop forms of intervention that can be implemented by the case manager specifically for the C&C program. This would help the case manager when choosing how to approach a situation with a student.



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**Appendix A**

**Scope of Work**

Item	February	March	April	May	August	September
Project proposal to Tier 2 team						
Select participants for the project.						
Contact parents for approval of participation						
Schedule parent and student meetings						
Meeting with tier 2 team, parent, student, C&C case manager.						
Student and parent weekly check-in.						
Collect weekly attendance and grade data.						
Present data weekly in tier 2 meetings.						
Evaluate student's grades and attendance						