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Greenfield High School Counseling Department: Behavioral Health Resources

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Abstract

Greenfield High School (GRHS) is a public school located in Greenfield California. Within the counseling department, the following services are provided: Four-year planning, college and career counseling, academic counseling, check-ins, transitioning eighth-grade students, and socio-emotional referrals. Greenfield High School offers services to about 1,384 students which are predominantly Hispanic students. The problem being addressed in GRHS is the lack of accessible behavioral health resources and the amount of time given to each student when connecting them to resources. The “Greenfield High School Counseling Department: Behavioral Health Resources” capstone project provides a more efficient way to refer students to mental health resources. The project consists of a binder folder with accessible behavioral health resources, general resources, online services, an educational pamphlet on mental health, and a needs form for the counselor to collect data and information on the student. The desired outcome of this project is for the GRHS counselors to successfully utilize the folder created for students with socio-emotional concerns, and to connect students with resources efficiently and in a timely manner. In order for Greenfield High School to address the issue at hand they would need to keep the additional data from the project and present the findings to their district in order to meet the recommended ratio of students to counselors.

Keywords: High school students, Behavioral Health, Community Resources, School Counseling

Agency & Communities Served

Greenfield High School is a California public school serving grades ninth through twelve with a high level of education. Greenfield is a small city in the California Salinas Valley, in Monterey County. Greenfield is surrounded by agricultural fields and is known for its vineyards and wineries. According to the U.S. Census Greenfield has a population of 19,076 and a Hispanic and/or Latino population of 91.9%. Greenfield High School's mission is the following: "Greenfield High School is committed to serving, empowering, and preparing all students to be resilient, independent, and mindful individuals prepared for career and higher education in a dynamic and multicultural society" (Greenfield High School, n.d.). Greenfield High School is under the South Monterey County Joint Union High School District located in King City. Regarding demographics at Greenfield High School, students have a large population of Hispanic and/or Latino students that the high school has the pleasure of serving. Greenfield High School has a 98.5% population of Hispanic students, 0.6% white students, and 0.5% Asian students. (U.S. News, n.d.) According to U.S. News, there is a 48% female population and a 52% male population (U.S. News, n.d.).

GRHS is able to provide a high level of education through caring employees, different departments, and administrators coming together to provide a welcoming and efficient learning environment. In order to provide all of these services there is a need not only for educators but for administrators and school counselors. School counselors have a variety of responsibilities within the school and often their duties go beyond those of their job description, especially in low-funded schools with a high need for resources. They are responsible for overseeing students' academics, making sure that they understand graduation requirements, making an educational career plan, explaining university requirements, collaborating with staff, adjusting student

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schedules, making therapist referrals, and more. Usually, school counselors focus more on academics but when there is a big need for socio-emotional resources their caseload can increase.

Problem Statement

The issue being addressed at Greenfield High School is the scarcity of readily available resources for behavioral health in the community as well as the time allotted to students for the preliminary evaluation and resource referrals. At GRHS there is specifically a large need for behavioral resources among other beneficial resources. The emphasis is on behavioral health because learning and academic success rely on students having a solid foundation. Greenfield High school has an outstanding graduation rate of 88% compared to the California average of 91.3% (Lambert, 2022). On the contrary, students at Greenfield are struggling with Math and English and are receiving lower scores than the state average (U.S. News, n.d.). Students cannot learn to the fullest of their ability unless they set aside time for their studies and have the right surroundings and mindset. Herr quotes "It is not a new insight that mental health and psychosocial problems must be addressed if schools are to function satisfactorily and if students are to learn and perform effectively" (Herr, E. L., 2002). A similar issue can be noted, counselors have had to assign more time to mental health concerns as opposed to academic counseling

The Greenfield High School: Behavioral Health Resources' capstone project could cut down the time students spend getting connected to resources and getting an initial assessment. The project consists of a folder with accessible behavioral health resources, general resources, online resources, a behavioral health pamphlet, and a student needs form. To elaborate, the intern created a list of local, and accessible mental health resources in the Monterey County area with an emphasis on South County. In addition, The educational pamphlet provides brief information

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about warning signs and the basics of mental health education. The student needs form will be filled out by the student and returned to their respective counselor for them to take appropriate steps. The form includes the counselor's services in a checklist form so the students can see what is available to them. On the second half of the form, there is a section where the students would be able to check what level of stress, anxiety, etc. they are experiencing. Giving the children this form may make it easier for them to describe their feelings and the precise services they need. This would be particularly beneficial for those children who are more reserved and reluctant to speak up. This form could also be used to track student data and progress for any future meetings. Ultimately, this initiative would make it easier and more seamless for GRHS counselors to refer children and families to resources.

Contributing Factors

Addressing the concern at GRHS there are three contributing factors that were observed. The following are the three contributing factors: increasing workload for school counselors, lack of accessible resources in the South Monterey County region, and poverty levels in the community. According to DeKruyff "Both school counselor roles, that of education and that of mental health professional, are necessary to address the overwhelming level of mental health needs of students" (DeKruyff, 2013). School counselors are having to take on more responsibilities that could be compared to those of a clinician or mental health counselor. School counselors are attending additional seminars and trainings to stay current with mental health preparation, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As claimed by Page, L., The results of this student's study implications demonstrated that the function of the school counselor is changing to include more mental health support and that additional professional development and graduate school preparation in this area are anticipated (Page, 2021). The role of the school

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counselor has been changing more than ever due to the rise of social media bullying, the recent COVID -19 pandemic, and general mental illness. School counselors are responsible for assisting students in achieving academic success and graduation in addition to caring for their mental and/or behavioral health. Manageable caseloads for school counselors, as indicated by Lapan (2012), enable counselors to better assist students in overcoming obstacles by focusing on their academic, professional, social, and emotional growth. For economically disadvantaged students to graduate from high school with their cohorts and be able to pursue their post-secondary ambitions, low student-to-school counselor ratios could be advantageous (as cited in Ortega et al., 2021). In order for students to graduate as well-rounded young adults, a balance between the emphasis on academics and mental health is necessary.

Rural towns and cities must provide various services that are easily accessible so that all individuals may receive enough support without having to travel great distances or wait months for an appointment. There are many resources inside a community that could benefit its residents; nevertheless, the essential resources that communities will always require are health, food, and educational services. ``Even with the movement toward school-based and school-linked services, most community mental health services remain isolated and fragmented from school initiatives and inaccessible to students and families'' (Lockhart, 1998). There is a great need for behavioral health counseling, housing, food, and other services, more specifically when being connected to educational systems. A quiet study room, college or career information, and check-ins with a counselor are the top three services needed by students, according to a survey of students at Greenfield High School (Greenfield High School, 2022). As previously mentioned, compared to nearby Central Valley cities, Greenfield has a smaller population. As a result, it is less probable that resources will be available for particular groups of people who require

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extremely specialized care. As claimed by Morales (2020) “Though the prevalence of serious mental illness and most psychiatric disorders is similar between US adults living in rural and urban areas, adults residing in rural geographic locations receive mental health treatment less frequently and often with providers with less specialized training, when compared to those residing in metropolitan locations” (Morales, 2020). Two small clinics in the town of Greenfield offer medical care to residents as well as GRHS students. Some cities accept Greenfield residents less than a half-hour away if a student needs to see a different therapist. When attempting to use these organizations' services, GRHS students can run into a transportation problem. The community's access to local services is frequently made more challenging by the fact that adjacent clinics in other towns frequently have staffing shortages and appointments that are scheduled months in advance. Driving to larger neighboring cities like Salinas, Marina, and Monterey is another option for GRHS students and their families. The distance between these cities might range from 35 minutes to 1 hour. Parents of these students may find it challenging to drive their kids such a distance after having a late workday. According to Graf, approximately one in six adults (16%) who have worked in the last two years report that there was a time during that time when they needed or wanted to take time off from work in order to care for a family member who had a serious health condition or to deal with their own serious health condition, but they were unable to do so. Among individuals with household earnings under \$30,000, this percentage increases to 30%. (Graf, 2020).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is apparent that globally we have been suffering from inflation, disemployment, and overall financial hardships. It was established that nearly half of the households (46.6%) experienced a modest decline in household income as a result of the pandemic. The percentage of households where the income remained consistent, according to

Pinkovetskaia, was slightly lower (45.6%). (Pinkovetskaia, 2022). Particularly when it comes to being able to afford therapy and counseling services, certain well-paying employment can provide great health care and other advantages. The typical household income in Monterey County, California, is 76,943 USD, according to Data Commons (Data Commons, n.d.).

According to the U.S. Census, the median household income in Greenfield is 64,879 USD (U.S. Census, n.d). The median household income for the city of Greenfield, as we can see, is less than the national average. Approximately 87% of students at Greenfield High School come from disadvantaged backgrounds, according to U.S. News (U.S. News, n.d.). As a result, it is possible they use fewer health and wellness services and fewer mental health services overall. Families in the South County region are primarily employed in agriculture. Agricultural labor work usually entails lower wages and long hours. Consequently, it's likely that a lack of time or money will prevent families from taking a leave of absence to focus on this concern. As claimed by Kanagaraj, It is evident that receiving and funding mental health care is so costly. The fact that most mental health specialists do not accept insurance is a basic but significant problem.

Although insurance is mostly used to pay for more than 90% of general healthcare services, an estimated 45% of psychiatrists do not accept insurance at all, and a far greater percentage only accept a limited proportion of insurance plans, making it very challenging for patients to locate adequate, in-network referrals (Kanagaraj, 2020). It is very telling how much income and socio-economic status can play a part in one's mental health and wellness.

Consequences

There are three consequences that will be focused on when taking into consideration the contributing factors and problem statement. The consequences of neglecting student-to-counselor ratio recommendations and the amount of time allowed for each student's issues are students not

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getting diagnosed early on, social isolation, and substandard academic success. Students receiving diagnosis and treatment in the early stages of their symptoms have many benefits. As stated by the Family Guidance Center “The sooner the illness is identified and addressed, the better the outcome. As it is, 70 percent of those who are diagnosed and treated see positive results” (Family Guidance Center, 2014). The sooner a student is diagnosed the faster they can start seeing progress in their mental health allowing them to focus more on their academic, and social life, and any other goals they might have. Early intervention, according to Mental Health America, can assist young people in recovering more rapidly, gaining the most from their schooling, forming great relationships, finding work, and eventually leading more fulfilling and prosperous lives (Mental Health America, n.d.).

Following, social isolation is a possibility when socio-emotional concerns are neglected. According to Wall Street Journal (2014), social isolation has long-lasting effects that not only have an impact on young people but also on the larger community. We are aware that by empowering young people, the world can be changed (Wall Street Journal, 2014). Social isolation has the probability of promoting a lack of interest in hobbies, social life, gatherings, and overall motivation to have a productive life. According to Cohut, Studies have revealed that those who experience close friendships over their teenage years seem happy; they also have a lower rate of depression or anxiety later in life (Cohut, 2018). Having a support system while experiencing mental health struggles can help boost motivation and productivity. Finding support and socializing with one’s family is crucial because parents are often the main source of guidance and have higher expectations of their children.

The last consequence that is being observed with this project is the possibility of receiving poor grades when neglecting mental health issues. According to Bortes, Unipolar

depression was the mental disorder associated with the lowest mean grade for male students. The disorders associated with the second and third lowest mean grades for male students were ADHD and anxiety disorder.” This demonstrates that even students with Diagnosed mental illness suffer from a decrease in academic success. In contrast, untreated mental illness may result in even greater drops in performance on academic tasks (Bortes, 2022). Dealing with mental health struggles can already entail a lack of motivation to do school work and poor grades can lead to guilt and a feeling of insufficiency. According to Dong (2021), extensive research demonstrated that GPA was connected consistently with several psychological outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, psychological distress, self-esteem, and problem behaviors among teenagers. For instance, depression and anxiety predict impairment of academic achievement across a sample of 5,689 college students (Dong, 2021). Deteriorating grades can be a cause of stress and anxiety but in turn, can be the root of mental health decline in students. Unsatisfactory grades have the potential of exacerbating previously present mental health symptoms or creating new health concerns.

Capstone Project Proposal and Justification

The main issue being addressed at Greenfield High School is the lack of readily accessible behavioral health options in the area, as well as the amount of time given to kids for the initial assessment and resource referrals. One significant contributor at Greenfield High is the ratio of school counselors to students. The ratio of students to counselors is severely poor when compared to the recommended average. Since 1965, the ASCA has advised a student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1, the organization claims (ASCA, n.d.). Given that there is less time to focus on the concerns of the students and their academics, having this many students on a caseload can be highly inefficient. The GRHS Aries DataBase reports that each counselor has an

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average of 461.3 pupils (Greenfield High School, 2022). The number of students listed in the data provided by the GRHS counseling department is double what is advised to allow for adequate time to support students' academic journeys. Additionally, according to Baker's 2013 study, there has historically been a pattern across the nation to reduce the number of professional school counselors, and associated positions, when the school budget is lowered (quoted in Molnar et al., 2022). The Greenfield High School: Behavioral Health Resources project could help ease the counselor's workload while providing a more efficient way to refer students to mental health resources. The project would consist of a folder with a paper listing local behavioral health resources and general resources, a mental health pamphlet, and a student needs menu. The student needs menu would give the counselors more insight into the problem the student is facing, focusing on the socio-emotional aspect. By completing this form, students could quickly connect to services without experiencing additional stress. This form would also aid the counselors by giving them a clearer picture of what their students need from them and reducing their workload. This would be especially helpful for any student that is more withdrawn, timid, or less likely to be vocal about the help they are looking for. The time the counselor allows to educate the student on fundamental mental health, noting local resources, and asking students one question at a time may be reduced if this folder is available to distribute as soon as the meeting begins. After the student fills out the form, the counselor may quickly review the responses and devote more time to providing the kid with clear advice and comfort.

To elaborate on the project, the intern would create a list of local, and accessible mental health resources in the Monterey County area with an emphasis on South County. In addition, The educational pamphlet would provide brief information about warning signs and the basics of mental health education for students. The needs menu form could be archived and referred to in

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the future if the student's issue develops in order to make appropriate next steps. The form would include the counselor's services in a checklist format so the students are able to see what services are available to them. On another portion of the form, there is a section where the students would be able to check what level of stress, anxiety, sadness, etc. they are experiencing. Giving GRHS students this form could make it less overwhelming for them to explain their situation, state symptoms, and describe what exact services they're hoping to receive from their counselor. Finally, the needs menu could be useful when collecting data and looking at the students' socio-emotional progress throughout the school years.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
School Counselors having an increase in student caseloads.	A high volume of students in Greenfield High School are in need of local mental health resources.	Students not getting diagnosed early on.
Lack of mental health resources in the SMC area.		Social isolation from family and friends.
Low household incomes in Greenfield California.		A decrease in academic success.

Implementation Process

The main steps taken by the intern in order to implement this project are research, drafting up documents, creative thinking, collaboration, and organization. Research is needed in order to verify the information on the brochure, and that the resource lists are accurate and up to date. It is also important to research needs assessments with effective and essential questions to

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determine the questions on the menu form. Collaboration and feedback are also fundamental when creating these documents. Taking a look at similar content created in the past is useful when creating or re-creating these types of documents. Previous forms and GRHS documents were used to create the documents ensuring it is the information appropriate for this specific school. For instance, general information and resources available in Monterey county are likely not to change in terms of crisis hotlines, etc. That type of information is revised and reused to be as efficient as possible. Adding new and updated information is where research is needed most. Finding new up-and-coming resources in suburban and or rural areas can be difficult and potentially lead to no new findings. Creativity is needed and even sharing the little information found online could be of use to at least a handful of GRHS families.

The first step taken by the intern was creating rough drafts of all three documents after conducting the research mentioned above. In South Monterey County, hardly many new resources have appeared. Since there wasn't much new material that needed to be included, the resource list was the first document to be completed. The intern substituted Salinas-based and online programs for the absence of mental health facilities in Greenfield. The list now included grief group counseling through Zoom, which had never been used by the students. Around this time is when the supplies were ordered by the intern to supply enough copies for all three counselors. Following this, the mentor provided detailed input to the needs menu form after the final draft of the resources. Receiving comments on the needs menu form is crucial since it is the key component of the folder and the means through which students will be able to express their wants and experiences. After receiving feedback on the form the document was transferred over to the platform Canva to have a more seamless and clean look. The following course of action was to creatively create a brochure to relay mental health warning signs in a simple yet

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educational manner. Finally, the last few steps were making 30 copies, getting final approval from all three counselors, assembling all folders, and distributing them to each counselor.

Project Results

The Greenfield High School Counseling Department: Behavioral Health Resources project aims to give counselors more time to focus on a student's social and emotional well-being and to make sure that they receive mental health services on time. Data collection and data entry for the project could take months, and the majority of the project's data would come through the needs menu form. The advantage of gathering information from the needs menu is that you can look at the services the student needs as well as their level of sadness, anxiety, etc. With this initiative, there could be a record of how many students experience these symptoms and noting if there is a decrease in symptoms and mental health resource referrals. Compiling and making a system to input this data is very necessary when looking at student progress and school mental health trends. Another use of collecting the needs menu data is we could see mental health trends and how they can fluctuate throughout the seasons, months, and even years. As stated by Lyness (2020), Depression that only affects a person during a particular season of the year is known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). When the days are shorter and it gets darker earlier in the fall and winter, people with SAD experience depression. The brain's reaction to seasonal fluctuations in daylight is what causes SAD (Lyness, 2020). Examining these patterns should help administrators and counselors plan for upcoming supportive measures during the months that showed a rise in mental health difficulties. Keeping up with these trends in mental health may assist to minimize some of these issues. Finally, It would require additional months of planning and recording to obtain the project's anticipated data results.

Conclusion & Recommendations

After the finalization of this project, the counselors involved in the use of this folder seemed very pleased with the ultimate goal and use of the folder. Using this folder and more specifically the needs menu form it is hoped that GRHS finds new data trends and overall sees a change in the amount of time spent with each student during counseling sessions. Students' positive progress in their mental health is one of the best possible results of this project.

Regarding recommendations at the GRHS school site, it would be beneficial for any new incoming interns at the site to add to this project. The first recommended addition would be to add additional new and upcoming resources in the South Monterey County area to the resource list. Adding this would give students and their families more options in regard to what city they receive their behavioral health services from. Adding other areas of resources would also be of benefit to this community. To elaborate, adding food bank services, transportation resources, more grief counseling services, etc. to the list. A new educational pamphlet that is more aimed toward parents and how they may support a student struggling with socio-emotional disorders and the likely symptoms being encountered could be something any new intern could add to the project. Lastly, researching and uploading data onto the most convenient system of data collection would be of benefit to the counseling department when keeping track of trends. Keeping and organizing this data has many benefits as mentioned previously. Making sure the new intern keeps track of each student's progress, as well as the students' progress by class, would also be beneficial. All things considered, this project has the utmost potential to bring a new form of counseling students, data tracking for GRHS, and student referrals, if taken on by a new intern.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Approval and Feedback for project description by a mentor.	Had a discussion with the mentor regarding the outcome of the project and overall goals.	October 2022	Katie Trujillo, Intern
Research needs and assessment forms.	Researched professional needs forms as well as current similar surveys used to assess student needs at GRHS.	October 2022	Intern
Create needs menu form draft on google docs.	Created needs menu form draft on Google docs before making final form on Canva.	October 2022	Intern
Purchase green 2-pocket folders (10 each Counselor), ink, and	Purchased bulk green 2-pocket folders, printer ink, and cardstock paper on	October 28th, 2022	Intern

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cardstock paper.	Amazon.com.		
Create the final resource list.	Finished the final touches and editing on the resource list on Canva.com.	October 2022	Intern
Create the final needs menu on Canva.	Made final edits on the needs menu form on Canva.	November 2022	Intern
Mentor approves and gives feedback on the needs menu form.	Presented final needs menu form to mentor and discussed any edits or feedback on the form.	November 2022	Katie Trujillo, Intern
Create a mental health brochure draft in both English & Spanish.	Created a brochure on mental health warning signs and education in both English and Spanish on the Canva platform.	November 2022	Intern
Print out the final resource list, brochure, and needs menu.	Printed out the final paperwork and added it	November 2022	Intern

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	to the final sample folder.		
Have all counselors approve the final folder.	Presented the final folder to all three GRHS counselors and discussed the use of the folder.	November 2022	Katie Trujillo, GRHS counselors, Intern
Print colored copies of all three final drafts.	Used a GRHS copy machine to make 30 copies of the sample folder.	December 2022	Intern
Assemble and turn in final folders to respective counselors.	The intern distributed 10 folders to each GRHS counsel for them to start utilizing.	December 2022	Intern, GRHS counselors