

Enhancing School Mental Health Services Project

Principal Welcome Session

August 2023

ABC School- A Journey to Comprehensive School Mental Health

ABC Elementary School, in northern New Jersey, serves students in grades K-8. ABC currently has 800 students enrolled with a diverse student population.

District staff and administration have decided to take a proactive approach to address student and staff mental health and wellness by implementing a comprehensive school mental health framework that offers evidence-based therapeutic and wellness services. Services include the following: social-emotional learning, parent and family community services, counseling, and psychological services.

ABC's principal, Dr. Alfa Bett, created a CSMH team that utilized the expertise of the school's existing mental health professionals, teachers, and community members. The team meets once a month to conduct a school-wide needs assessment, including resource mapping and implementing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to identify high-risk students for internalizing and externalizing problems. The team decided to start on a small scale with the students in 5th grade. A letter was sent to inform teachers and parents of a week-long screening during first-period homeroom.

The team is also responsible for evaluating their CSMH systems, aligning student services using data, fostering school partnerships, and receiving school mental health training.

Within a very short period of time, district and school leaders have made a substantial impact. During the SMH teaming process, the team established a key goal for the school year: to increase student Tier 2 interventions and improve community mental health supports.