



**Mental Wellness
and
School Mental Health Professional (SMHP) Update**



February 2, 2023

Needs: The 2022-23 school year brought continued concerns regarding student mental wellness and health. While many talk about the COVID pandemic ending, we see the continued impact on social isolation, attendance/engagement, financial struggles, housing instability and evictions, increased negative coping strategies, depression, and anxiety as well as the mental health crisis that was taking place prior to COVID. Community violence, hoax calls, and lock-downs created a sense of anxiety and fear for many students, staff, and families. When safety, real or perceived, is threatened, the need for mental health and wellness services increases. A significant increase in families from Afghanistan, as well as other refugee students and families, requires an increase in mental wellness supports.

Staff Capacity: We continue to have a variety of school mental health professionals in our schools serving our students and families. Teams made up of school counselors, social workers, clinical social workers, social emotional support counselors, and school psychologists work together to meet the needs of our schools and students and support staff. Charlottesville High School has one vacancy (clinical social worker) as there is a current struggle in filling mental health positions, in general.

Additionally, we have a variety of interns in multiple disciplines, receiving support and supervision from our school mental health professionals. Having interns helps with our capacity to serve students, it also allows us to grow professional connections and develop trained professionals to join the field, especially as we struggle to fill our school mental health positions.

One of the unique aspects of the Charlottesville City Schools mental wellness program is the ability to provide clinical consultation and supervision for our school mental health professionals. Having both peer support (mental wellness teams) and access to the mental wellness coordinator allows for better practice and aligned coordination throughout the division. Additionally, Charlottesville City Schools participates in the Virginia Partnership for School Mental Health (grant funded and facilitated by UVA and DOE) allowing for increased clinical practice skills, application, and professional collaboration. SMHP feedback continues to be positive about the model of support that meets the needs of students and families, as well as their own mental wellness.

Within the VTSS system, Tier 1 is critically important as it is intended to proactively meet students' needs through explicit instruction. Tier 1 Mental Wellness continues to be an area that our schools need to continue to refine and implement with fidelity. Until Tier 1 Mental Wellness (social emotional learning) is solidly provided for all students, there will be an additional burden placed on Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Function and Service: The school mental health professionals continue to provide tier 2 and 3 interventions to students as determined through VTSS teams. While individual case loads may vary from SMHP to SMHP, workloads are currently very heavy. The school mental health professionals provide individualized support (specific mental health struggles, engagement for

chronic absenteeism, grief/loss, and emotional regulation, as well as other specifically identified needs), provide groups and crisis intervention, navigate external community agencies, resources, and restorative practices, and so much more. SMHPs are serving anywhere from 10-20 individual students and families, not including the students in their groups and other crises, as well as managing many other responsibilities.

Family engagement (home visits, supporting administrators and staff in communication and connection with families, and connecting to needed services) is also a large part of the SMHP's role. The connection between families and a trusted SMHP at school can begin to make the needed change for students.

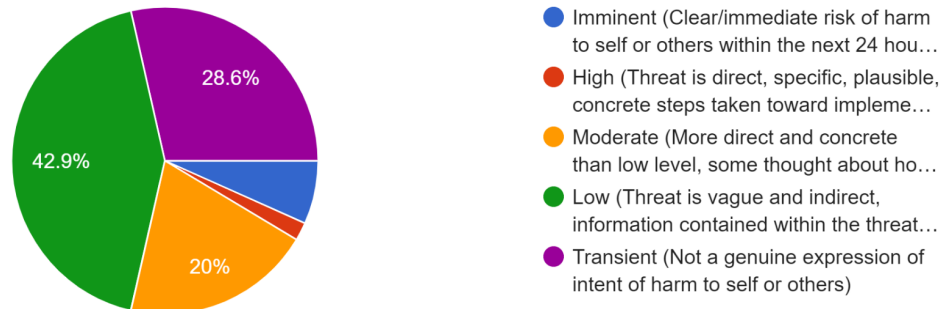
The SMHPs continue to provide professional learning to staff, offer support, safety and connection to a variety of students in tier 1, problem solve, plan with teachers and staff, and provide clinical consultation on a variety of topics. The system is strained in some places creating an inverted triangle in relation to mental wellness and the VTSS triangle. The SMHPs play an integral part in school success, but we need to be mindful of how much stress and pressure is placed on them.

Threat Assessment Data: A significant point of data, and increase in workload, during the 2022-23 school year is the number of threat assessments. From 8/25/2022 through 1/19/2023 there have been 183 referrals to a threat assessment team. Of these 183 referrals, the threat assessment team determined that 78 of the situations were “no threats” and did not enter the full threat assessment process. However, the other 105 referrals required a full threat assessment (57 threats to self and 48 threats to others). As a means of comparison, for the 2021-22 school year, 182 threat assessments were completed (no threat was not an option, so many referrals were documented as a full threat assessment) and 67 threat assessments were completed through 1/19/2022.

Threat assessments take a lot of time and are considered the beginning of a process regardless of the determined level of threat. Intervention and case management is provided, as needed, to ensure students get their needs met, as well as working with families to put services in place outside of school, if needed or wanted.

What is the assessed level of risk?

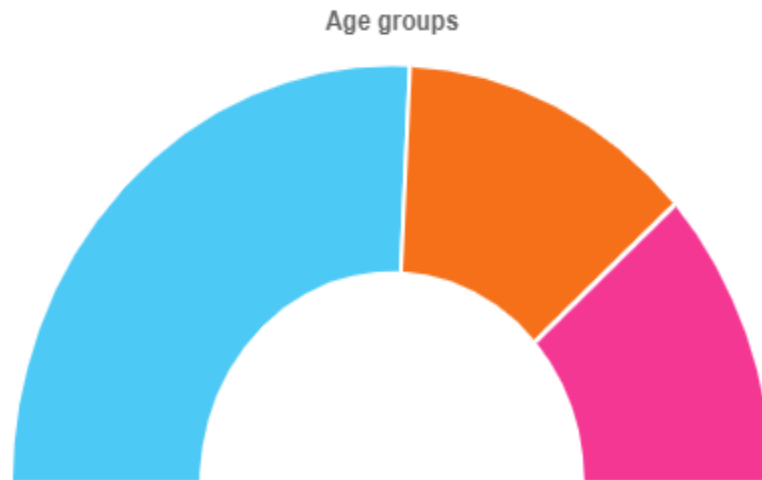
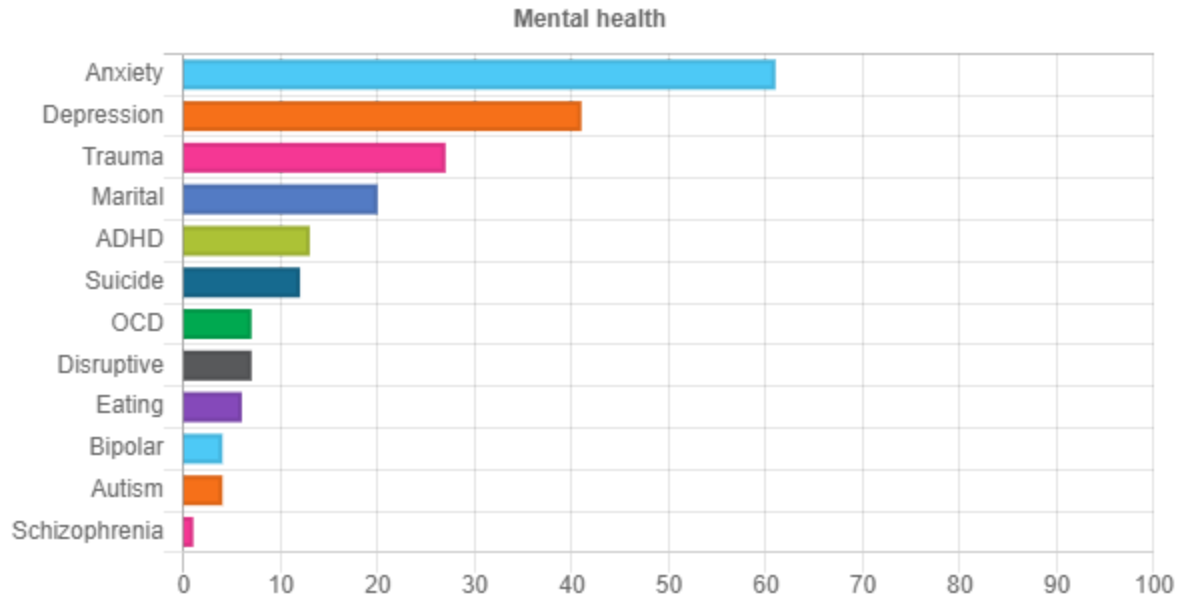
105 responses



McKinney-Vento: The SMHPs (social workers, clinical social workers and social emotional support counselors) support our families who meet criteria and are identified as being homeless. This school year, there is a substantial increase in the identification of families. Currently, as of this school year, 98 students (46 families) are identified and are supported by SMHPs. For the entirety of the 2021-22 school year, 56 students (30 families) were identified.

Support can look different, depending on the individual needs of students and families. Resources such as transportation, community resource connections, problem solving, clothing vouchers, food cards, and on-going support from an SMHP are available as assessment is made. The SMHP works alongside the family and student to remove barriers to education while trying to make community connections to help the family with housing. Ten families of the 46 secured permanent housing this school year. Housing work is slow and many times frustrating as our SMHPs do not have any solutions for the family other than remaining connected and available.

Care Solace: Since partnering with Care Solace in April of 2022, we have steadily used their service to connect students, families, staff, and staff's families with counseling and other clinical services. When combining warm handoffs (CCS staff have made the referral) and family initiated cases, 83 total referrals were made to Care Solace since July of 2022. Thirty seven percent of these referrals started care, understanding that the national average for someone who receives a list of resources and searches on their own hovers just around 18%. Additionally, the 37% does not take into account the number of open referrals that Care Solace is working on at the moment (9 warm handoffs and 13 family initiated cases were initiated in December and January). The confidential website was searched over 100 times since July 2022, so we also know that others are attempting to access mental health services. Please see below for some additional data to see a break down of mental health struggles identified, as well as age break down for services.



Adults (18-64): 51%
Adolescents (12-17): 25%
Children (3-11): 23%