

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CARE School Mental Health Capacity Building Partnership (SMH-CBP)



OREGON YOUTH GROUP: SUMMARY REPORT

On August 13th, 2007, students from around Oregon participated in a youth discussion group sponsored by the School Mental Health Capacity Building Partnership (SMH-CBP), a national initiative made possible through a cooperative agreement between the National Assembly on School Based Health Care (NASBHC) and the Centers for Disease Control/Division of Adolescent and School Health, that aims to build capacity of schools to provide effective and sustainable school mental health services. The one and a half hour youth discussion group was part of a series of stakeholder discussion groups held in Oregon to enhance the SMH-CBP's understanding of how school mental health policies and practices operate at the state and local level.

The purpose of a youth-only stakeholder group was to identify, from a youth perspective, the most effective strategies for providing mental health services in schools and for engaging youth in the development of school mental health policies and programs. Six students, from grades 9-12, representing four different schools, participated in the group. Four of the students were recruited through the Oregon Family Support Network and two were recruited from Columbia River Wraparound. Four of the six students were identified as having emotional disabilities. The group was facilitated by Laura Hurwitz, Director of School Mental Health Programs at NASBHC. The youth were asked a series of questions (below):

1. How can adults at your school make all students feel supported both in school as well as other areas of their life?

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| Adults should not hold biases or judge youth. | <i>There are a lot of biases in my school....about the way you dress, the way you talk.</i> <i>"Everybody refers us to us as dove brats b/c that is where we hang out and because were smokers."</i> |
| Teachers should engage students more in | <i>"Sometimes they talk too much...they don't give us a</i> |

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| discussion. | <i>chance to talk; it makes it really boring"</i> <i>"Have open debates."</i> |
| Teachers should be less controlling. | <i>"Teachers should be nicer to kids."</i> |
| Improve the physical environment by making it more colorful. | <i>"Paint might help the school to be more inviting..."</i> <i>"The brick looks more like a prison every day."</i> <i>"Murals would be way cool!"</i> |
| Make the classroom feel more comfortable | <i>"Instead of having a bunch of desks... put in living room furniture"</i> <i>"if the classroom doesn't feel comfortable, you don't want to be there."</i> |

2. How is this similar or different from what should be done to make students with mental health problems feel supported?

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| Students with mental health problems should have the same freedom as other students. | <i>"Students with mental health problems...they need to be able to do what kids without mental health problems do...walk around the school, no questions asked."</i> |
| Teachers should make sure that the students with mental health problems don't get picked on. | <i>"I've seen a couple of teachers just sit there and laugh."</i> |
| During passing periods teachers should monitor the halls. | <i>"Teachers should take more time to walk and the halls and see what's going on."</i> |
| Teachers should try to understand students with mental health problems. | <i>"If the student has a MH issue, try to understand them, don't just treat them as if they were 'special'."</i> |
| Schools should have a quiet place for students to go if they experience anxiety. | <i>"A place to go if they get overwhelmed if they have anxieties...something where (you are) not stuck in the classroom with 30 other kids..."</i> <i>"In my school, they were thinking about making an actual classroom into a place where people could go and hang out..."</i> |

3. What about students who receive special services (for example those students in special education classes)?

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| Have students move to different classes rather than staying in one self-contained classroom. | <i>"Have students go to different classes like 'normal students'"</i> |
| Giving students in special education jobs without stigmatizing them. | <i>"They have them clean around the school – it keeps them (be) constructive."</i> |
| Students who have trouble learning should learn at their own pace. | <i>"They should be taught at their own learning speed."</i> |

4. How can you tell if adults in your school understand the different cultures or backgrounds a student comes from?

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| Some teachers may make offensive comments. | <i>"The teachers at my school are more focused on students who are good at sports...me and my brother showed up in</i> |
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| | <i>jeans, t-shirt and cowboy hats...and they would be insulting us..."</i> |
| Some teachers ask invasive questions. | <i>"You know how this whole immigration thing is going on?... well, we were in a class and this teacher was asking us if we were born here and stuff like that.... she said, 'well, your parents may have to go back.' We went to tell the Principal and they got her fired."</i> |
| Teachers who speak more openly with students seem to have a better understanding of cultures. | <i>"Some teachers are more closed off than others... the free spoken ones seem to understand better."</i> |

5. What could adults do to better understand students' differences?

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| Adults can learn about culture by becoming involved in activities. | <i>"At our school we have a spirit week and each day dedicated to a different culture... it helps the teachers because they dress up and get into the activities too."</i> |
| Adults should accept students' differences. | <i>"Teachers should just go with you..."</i> |
| Adults should talk to students at their level. | <i>"They will actually talk to you on an equal level without making some crude comment"</i> |
| Adults should ask about the students' culture to show interest. | <i>"(On the first day) they hand out a syllabus and a 'get to know you' quiz"</i> |
| Adults should build a relationship with their students | <i>"Get to know them over the years."</i> |

6. How well do you think that adults in your school respond to students with health problems, such as a student who has a physical disability or a health condition such as diabetes?

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| They do not always respond well. | <i>"They don't give them (students with physical disabilities) as much respect as those who are fully capable."</i> <i>"I had snapped my wrist in 3 places, and I couldn't write or do PE. They told me I had to drop my classes. They told me I was going to fail because I had a broken arm."</i> <i>"Sometimes they make you stay home."</i> |
| Some adults respond well. | <i>"I have health problems that can be severe at times, and they are always understanding... they ask me 'How are you feeling today?'"</i> |

7. How well do you think that adults in your school respond to students with mental health problems?

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| Adults have a better understanding of physical health problems than of mental health problems. | <i>"I think they get scared of students who have mental health issues, because they don't know what to expect."</i> |
| Adults treat students w/ health problems better than those w/ mental health issues | <i>"Usually they are more lenient to students with physical health problems. a broken wrist will heal; mental health issues – you're stuck w/ it for life, apparently."</i> |
| Some adults respond well by giving extra help, being supportive, and give extra attention. | <i>"In my school they do a pretty good job. I had mental health disabilities and I needed a lot of extra help (which they gave me), and (now) I'm always up to date with my"</i> |

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| | <i>work."</i> <i>"I had one teacher who would send kids home if they were having a really rough day.... I thought that was really nice."</i> |
| Teachers with a relationship with the student seem to be the most supportive. | <i>"I had flash backs...I completely blacked out and was acting out with the emotions I was feeling with the flashback... after that, I was treated the same (by the teacher.) He was a little more lenient on me...since this was an emotional thing, he loosened up on me."</i> |
| Several students hadn't observed difference in how students are treated. | |

8. What could be done so that adults better understand student's mental health problems?

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| Adults should spend more time with students and pay more attention to them | <i>"Have the principal tell teachers to spend more time and pay more attention to students"</i> |
| Teachers should receive mental health training and have access to a mental health consultant | <i>"If it were my choice, I'd want all teachers to go to a mental health training at least 2-3 times a year and have an on-site MH rep at all times...that person could show them how to handle a situation."</i> |
| Treat students with more respect. | |
| Adults should be more aware. | |

9. Think about the adults in your school whom you trust the most. What makes you trust them?

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| They are accessible. | <i>"She is always there for me to help me... I can talk to her about things I can't talk to my mom about..."</i> |
| They assist students with projects. | <i>"I had a teacher who helped me out with a lot of things...like with projects and stuff..."</i> |
| Intuition | <i>"They have this 'aura' I guess... they have this air about them... I just have this feeling that I can trust this person, and generally it works..."</i> |
| The adult is willing to trust the student. | <i>"I trust them because they are willing to trust me....my metals teacher gave me a chance..."</i> |
| One teacher showed an investment in the learning of ALL students. | |

10. Is there anything that they could do that would stop you from trusting them?

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| Talking behind the student's back; not being confronted directly about a problem. | <i>"I trust you until you hurt me...make me mad... stab me in the back."</i> <i>Confronting someone else about a problem about me...they don't want to face me and tell me there's a problem...if I'm doing something wrong, I want to know about it."</i> |
| Breaking confidentiality | <i>"Breaking confidentiality is big with me."</i> |
| Getting a parent involved without telling student | <i>"If they talk to my Mom"</i> |

11. If you or a friend had a personal problem and needed to talk to someone in the school about it, who or where would you go to first?

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| Friends or Parents | <i>"I talk to my friends or wait till I got home and talk to my parents"</i> <i>"My friend is my walking, breathing diary...she won't hold a grudge..she doesn't judge me"</i> <i>"We try not to get teachers involved in that kind of stuff."</i> |
| Counselors | <i>"I trust the counselors in the counseling office."</i> |
| A teacher they trust | <i>"I go to teachers I trust."</i> |

12. Is someone in your school assigned to help students with their problems?

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| Most students said that they were not aware that there is someone in their school to help students. | |
| There was a perception that counselors are there for academic, not mental health, problems | <i>"We go to counselor to change classes..."</i> |
| In several schools, the school mental health counselor and/or nurse has limited availability | <i>"Our mental health counselor is only there one day a week."</i> <i>"We have one nurse who has to go to all of the different schools."</i> |

13. What could the school do to make it easier to ask for help?

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| Have a mental health professional available who could be brought in to address issues that arise. | <i>"Have somebody on call everyday of the week."</i> |
| Remove kids from stressful situations. | <i>"Remove them from the situation and get them in their own element to talk"</i> |
| Provide transportation for students who need to go to the hospital. | |

14. If a student had a problem that was serious enough (e.g. someone who wanted to hurt themselves) and needed some kind of counseling, who in the school would be the best person to give them this kind of help?

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| Students would prefer to go to someone they trust. | <i>"They don't trust the people... If you are feeling suicidal, most of the time you are insecure, so you feel awkward to be around other people...our counselors haven't been through it, they wouldn't know what to do."</i> <i>"You wouldn't want to talk to some stranger... you want to talk to a close person to you."</i> |
| Counseling office or a mental health professional (if there is one). | |
| Principal or nurse | <i>"There was someone in the nurses' office or principal and they had a direct contact number."</i> |

15. If a student does receive counseling, how much of what they say do you think should be kept confidential or private? Are there any exceptions?

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| Everything should be kept private unless: 1) a student gives specific permission to tell | <i>"All of it."</i> <i>"Every single last word of it."</i> |
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| someone, or 2) if student makes a direct threat to someone's life or their own life | <i>"If you said 'I don't mind you telling this to somebody.'" "If there is a direct threat on life of another person, (they) should probably inform someone about that."</i> |
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16. What can the school do so that students understand that what they say in counseling is confidential?

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| Most students don't believe that information exchanged in counseling is truly confidential. | <i>"I was helping out one of my friends... and the counselor and his mom were always on the phone... I didn't feel his privacy was being respected." "It seems like when you go to talk to someone and you say you 'please don't say anything', it seems like they tell another person and then you hear it around the corner."</i> |
| Post a sign that counseling is confidential outside the Office. | |
| Explain that counseling is confidential in the school handbook. | |
| Hold an event at beginning of year where the counselors explain counseling is confidential. | <i>"At the beginning of the year they have a pep rally... They should have counselors come down and introduce themselves, tell where their offices are at and let everyone know that counseling is confidential."</i> |

17. If a teacher or counselor is concerned about something a student tells them and needs to share information about it with another adult, how should they go about doing this?

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| Ask the student if they can share information first. | <i>"Ask if they can share that piece of information...common courtesy works wonders."</i> |
| Have the student sign a release form stating whether information can or cannot be shared. | <i>"You may say please don't tell anybody...and you have nothing to prove that (you said that)"</i> |

18. Has anyone here been involved in any programs outside of the classroom (but in your school) that have helped you feel better about yourself?

- Next Door Inc.(2) – volunteer to help incoming freshman
- Committed Partners for Youth – college student is paired with an at-risk youth (e.g. big-brother/big sister for older students)
- Eugene Police Department Police Academy – SWAT training course (e.g. learned finger printing, driving police cars through cones)
- Musical groups – Choir (2), Jazz choir, band, Jazz band
- Sports -- Swim team, track, football with friends
- Youth Advisory Board

Outside School

- Oregon family support network (OFSN)
- Youth Advocates Helping Others Overcome (YAHOO) - youth mental health support group
- CSAC – youth advocating for youth peers in mental health

19. What made this a positive experience for you?

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| It feels good to help others. | <i>"Not just tell them 'oh go do this' but show them how to do"</i> |
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| | <p><i>it"</i></p> <p><i>"It let's me share everything I have gone through. Maybe help someone else so they have less problems."</i></p> <p><i>"We have presented at conferences...we tell people what it is like dealing with stigma...it's quite fun to hear people's reactions... they realize they've done it (stigmatized others) themselves."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes me feel good that I can share my experiences with someone who may have had them (too) and let them know they'll be ok."</i></p> |
| Improved self esteem | <p><i>"It makes me feel good about myself"</i></p> <p><i>"It is what I live for. Music is my life...it gives me satisfaction of knowing I can do it."</i></p> <p><i>"it let me hold myself a little higher"</i></p> |
| Like the person who leads it. | <i>"Really cool, outgoing, funny."</i> |
| Gained a new perspective | <i>"It showed me what the police was really like because I had had a previous experience that made me not like them...gave me some of the respect for them I had for them back"</i> |
| Awareness of positive alternatives to drugs | <i>"It changed my life... it showed me that there is something else that I could do instead of doing drugs and all that bad stuff."</i> |
| Enjoyment | <i>"It makes me enjoy life. We get to go out of town and go somewhere else..."</i> |
| Leadership | <i>"We plan support group activities...I like having a say in what we do instead of the adults deciding..."</i> |
| Friends | <i>"I have friends in it. It makes it easier to go."</i> |

19. How would you improve or change the program to make it even better for you or other students?

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| Create a leadership group for students who are most committed in the program | <i>"I suggested, 'let's take the kids who are more serious and put them here, and the kids who want to take them time, put them here..."</i> |
| Make it more challenging. | <i>"I would like more challenging music- I like to be challenged."</i> |

21. We know that you are all in some way involved in helping your school, community and peers through your involvement in today's activity. If a peer of yours was asked to participate in a similar kind of committee or activity with a group of adults, what would make them want to participate?

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| Incentives (e.g. food, money, activities) | <i>"Entice them with activities, food and money"</i> |
| Hold interactive activities | <p><i>"Activities should involve everybody... if you're going to ask questions, bring something to toss back and forth."</i></p> <p><i>"If it's during the summer, you could entice them w/ swimming and then after the fun, you talk to them..."</i></p> |
| Their friends participating. | <i>"I came because my friend came."</i> |
| Self motivation | <i>"They (the students) have to want it..."</i> |

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22. What would make them not want to participate?

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| If the activity resembles school. | <i>"If it you make it feel like school."</i> |
| If you there is a cost or if you have to find your own transportation. | <i>"If you have to pay your way."</i> |

23. In what ways do you like to participate in these kind of activities?

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| Lead | <i>"Listen, then from what you learn, lead!"</i> |
| Follow | <i>"I do what I'm asked"</i> |
| Observe | <i>"Listen and observe."</i> |
| Provide input | <i>"I like having option of providing putting my input in"</i> |

24. What do you think youth could offer to a committee or activity like this that an adult could not?

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| Realistic idea of what works for youth and what needs to be changed. | <i>"Sometimes adults make decisions that are not convenient for the youth... when they get the youth input (and if they listen)...it will work." "Real life stories... what is actually been happening.. if you listen to us, you can get real input and figure out ...(what) needs to be changed."</i> |
| Unique and broader perspective about how to approach youth. | <i>"Youth have different ways of looking at things than adults." "If you have a meeting trying to work out a youth situation... when you bring a youth in, three or four other doors open... if you have youth opinion, you know what they need."</i> |
| Adults can learn about the issues facing youths currently which may be different from what adults experienced as youth | <i>"Information about how to treat kids. What should you do and what shouldn't you do. Kids will tell you what's going on and stuff...but you could learn a few things about nowadays."</i> |
| Increases possibility that youth will enjoy it and stay involved. | <i>"If it fits the youth's criteria you know they will have fun, they will enjoy it, and you don't have to deal w/ the kids thinking this is dumb and causing mischief."</i> |

25. If you could give one message to schools about it could improve schools to help students, what would you say?

- 1) *"Accept the youth's voice."*
- 2) *"Do what you can....within legal limits, more education, give more stuff to the school..."*
- 3) *"Put youth on the school board."*
- 4) *"Allow students their freedom... if you don't want students breaking rules, don't have them."*
- 5) *"Be patient with the students."*
- 6) *"Help students more."*