

Spotting students' emotional needs

Most children in need of mental health services don't receive them, a crisis compelling schools to identify kids whose symptoms go unnoticed, says Sandra Syglowski, a project coordinator at the Delaware Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services (PBHS).

To better recognize and support these children, CDS, PBHS, the Delaware Department of Education and others kicked off in 2018 the five-year, federally funded Project DeLAWARE initiative. Part of the larger goal of expanding schools' mental health supports, it engaged Capital, Colonial and Indian River school districts in universal screening, an approach that identifies mental health risk factors by analyzing data from students, teachers and families. Districts identified new survey tools, enabling educators to make informed choices about supporting students' mental well-being.

The coronavirus pandemic interrupted the districts' universal screening plans, but CDS Instructional Coach Niki Kendall says she worked with district staff "to be proactive," looking for preexisting data that could serve the same purpose. Colonial Behavior Support Coach Christina MacKerchar says the work should "not just support students' academic needs, but their behavioral, social and emotional needs, too."

The goal is to "prove how valuable [these mental health supports] are," says Syglowski, "then bring them to other districts."



CDS Instructional Coach Niki Kendall helps school districts identify risks to students' mental well-being.