The California Department of Education (CDE) is committed to increasing mental health services to support the socio-emotional well-being of all students. In 2014, CDE was awarded a five-year Federal grant to implement Project Cal-Well statewide and in partnership with three Local Education Agencies (LEAs): Garden Grove Unified School District, ABC Unified School District, and San Diego County Office of Education.

The mission is to increase awareness of and improve mental health and wellness of California’s students, and provide training for school personnel to detect and respond to mental health issues.

This brief describes the Project Cal-Well model and provides highlights of successes and lessons learned over five years of implementation.


The California Department of Education (CDE) is committed to increasing mental health services to support the socio-emotional well-being of all students. In 2014, CDE was awarded a five-year Federal grant to implement Project Cal-Well statewide and in partnership with three Local Education Agencies (LEAs): Garden Grove Unified School District, ABC Unified School District, and San Diego County Office of Education.

The mission is to increase awareness of and improve mental health and wellness of California’s students, and provide training for school personnel to detect and respond to mental health issues.

This brief describes the Project Cal-Well model and provides highlights of successes and lessons learned over five years of implementation.
Students with mental health needs are more likely to receive services when they are offered in school than in the community. Project Cal-Well schools hired a range of providers, including credentialed and licensed providers, to support students in need.

### Component 2: School-Based Mental Health Services

*To increase access to school-based individual and group mental health (SBMH) services*

Students were provided SBMH services in 2018-19, an increase of 154% from 2,664 in 2013-14.

- **More school staff reported that they referred students to SBMH professionals in the past 12 months**
  - 2015-16: 75%
  - 2018-19: 85%
- **More students reported that they would seek help from a counselor, doctor, or therapist if scared, stressed, or depressed**
  - Secondary students: 19% (2015-16) vs. 22% (2018-19)
  - Elementary students: 27% (2015-16) vs. 22% (2018-19)

### Component 3: Community Partnerships

*To build partnerships and cross-system collaborations to promote youth well-being and access to community-based services*

Component 3 focuses on providing intensive mental health interventions to students with mental health needs through strong community collaborations. Schools work closely with community-based behavioral health organizations to develop referral pathways to ensure students receive needed interventions.

- **Project Cal-Well LEAs reported an increased number of behavioral health service referrals to community-based agencies**
  - 2015-16: 776
  - 2018-19: 1,154
- **An increased percentage of school staff in Project Cal-Well schools reported that they referred students to community-based mental health services**
  - 2015-16: 24%
  - 2018-19: 42%
- **93% of referrals to community-based agencies resulted in services being provided, an increase from 83% in 2015-16**
Garden Grove Unified School District

- **Implemented** PBIS, Restorative Practices, Mindfulness Practices, Suicide Prevention, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs and Second Step pilot
- **Hired** Psychologist Interns, School Psychologists and School Social Workers
- **Increased** capacity to refer and provide school and community-based counseling to students through expanded community partnerships

ABC Unified School District

- **Implemented** PBIS, Socio-Emotional Learning Curricula, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs, Trauma-Informed Care, Restorative Practices, and Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention.
- **Hired** Mental Health Professionals and School Social Workers
- **Developed** a Community Resource Team partnership of local social service and mental health agencies

San Diego County Office of Education

- **Implemented** PBIS, Socio-Emotional Learning Curricula, Mental Health Trainings for Staff, YMHFA, NCHS Clubs, Trauma-Informed Practices, Restorative Practices, School-Wide Information Systems, and training in youth suicide prevention, intervention and postvention
- ** Recruited** and placed graduate level counseling interns/staff in schools
- **Developed** a comprehensive trauma-informed suicide risk assessment toolkit to help districts to move from policy to practice in their schools

**6,725**

Staff from 42 school districts and charter schools trained on mental health and wellness, positive school climate and trauma-informed care

**2,550**

Youth referred to a mental health service by YMHFA trained adults

- **Over the course of the grant, 9th grade student outcomes improved:**
  - **↓ 6%** Decrease in suicide ideation
  - **↑ 5%** Increase in school connectedness

- **Over the course of the grant, more school staff reported that their schools:**
  - Provide adequate counseling and support services for students with mental health needs
  - Communicate to students that help is available for their mental health needs
  - Emphasize helping students with their social, emotional and behavioral problems

- **Increase in 9th & 11th graders reporting high levels of school connectedness**
- **Decline in suicide ideation among 9th graders**
- **Increase in 9th & 11th graders reporting there were caring adults at school**
- **30%**
The first cohort of Project Cal-Well was funded by a five-year (2014–19) “Now Is The Time” Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to the California Department of Education. The University of California, San Francisco School Health Services Research & Evaluation Team evaluated the project and produced this report: https://healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/school-health-services-evaluation.

**Launching and Implementing Project Cal-Well**
- Engage and obtain buy-in from school and district leadership
- Clarify expectations school-wide
- Assess and support staff wellness
- Recruit part-time providers or graduate level mental health interns as a pilot
- Provide ongoing support and coaching to project leads and mental health professionals
- Create formal screening and referral processes to identify and serve students in need
- Identify and establish formal partnerships with community-based organizations to refer and support students in need

**Ensuring Sustainability**
- Create ownership by offering schools choices in the selection of evidence-based strategies
- Hire in-house mental health staff to build district infrastructure
- Integrate Project Cal-Well goals with district policies, goals, or existing initiatives
- Capitalize on district Local Control and Accountability Plan to braid funding
- Share success stories widely to capitalize on and promote value of the program

**Looking Forward**

**Expanding the Reach**: CDE was awarded a new Federal grant to implement Project Cal-Well in Northern California, in partnership with Humboldt, Sacramento, and Stanislaus County Offices of Education from 2019-2024 (Cohort 2).