Case Challenge
Spring 2022
IUB School of Education

“Protecting Youth Mental Health”
Be part of the solution to helping youth overcome pandemic-related mental health challenges.

Setting the Stage
In March of 2020, school districts were forced to stop in-person instruction to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. After two years, not only is it clear that there has been an inequitable loss of instruction and learning in schools, but also that the rates of mental health challenges among young people have soared. Many P-12 students who were at a disadvantage before the pandemic due to poverty, disability, etc., have fallen even farther behind in school as the nation and world continue to react to the vast impact of COVID-19. Moreover, the stress this pandemic has created for our young people appears to be growing and getting worse. In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General stated, “Recent national surveys of young people have shown alarming increases in the prevalence of certain mental health challenges…. persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an overall increase of 40% from 2009.” (surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf (hhs.gov))

We are asking your team to take on this challenge!

Problem Statement
Pandemic-related mental health challenges can be exacerbated by social isolation, anxiety, depression, and numerous other factors that negatively impact mental and emotional wellbeing. For low income, language-minority, and other underserved populations, such challenges can be far greater and more complicated. One result is that schools are having to address more student behavioral challenges, higher levels of toxicity in out-of-school environments, and increasing rates of suicide and suicidal ideation. The potential for serious and long-term negative impact are incredibly far-reaching. The Surgeon General put it this way, “the challenges today’s generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.”

As a response to the pandemic, federal funds are now available to school districts to confront these challenges. Provided by the American Rescue Plan (ARP), these funds are administered by the U.S. Department of Education through ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief programs.

ARP ESSER funds may be used to address the many impacts of COVID-19 on pre-K through 12 education such as implementing strategies to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students hit hardest by the pandemic, including through evidence-based interventions and critical services like community schools.
This offers important opportunities for our schools to address the inequities in funding resources in high poverty areas, reinvent how they educate students and connect with families, and expand their partnerships in communities (e.g., mental health providers, health services, behavioral and academic intervention specialists in all buildings, etc.)

How would your team use these funds?

**Project Parameters**
This project specifically asks teams to address the following question:

*How can P-12 schools and school districts provide innovative and creative supports for students, and their families, who are dealing with mental health challenges?*

As a team of educators, you have been asked to come up with creative, innovative supports, resources, and interventions for a local school district’s *student well-being initiative*. For the sake of this project, the district has between 5000 and 10,000 students, from preschool to high school (focusing on other size districts such as small rural or large city schools is allowed). The district educates students from low income and underserved populations, including students identified with disabilities. Your team can make use of community resources and agencies (such as library; YMCA; 100 Black Men of America; health and mental clinics; public health department; Boys and Girls Club, and many others), and ‘out-of-school time’ as part of your plans. You can also create new organizations to support your project. You can use public information from credible sources such as the peer reviewed literature, IES, CDC, NIMH, SAMSHA, DOE, APA, researchers, etc.

Ultimately, you will present your recommendations to a school district administration team that includes family representatives and practitioners from partnering community agencies. Your team should create a presentation to include the rationale your team used and the plan your team developed, including the research your team conducted to support your recommendations.

How will your team ensure that a core focus on equity is included in your plan?

**Outcomes**
Teams should be comprised of 2-4 educators. Your primary products to share can include:

- Programming that is targeted to ages 0-5 and/or grades K-8, 9-12, or young adults (16-21).
- Types of screening instruments used to assess students, including mental and emotional well-being.
- Plans that allow for time and opportunities so students can converse about their feelings in supportive settings.
- Partnerships with agencies and/or corporations that have resources, as well as the greater community, to address mental health issues.

Programming may have an overall theme and inclusion of community resources (e.g., partnerships with community agencies; outdoor opportunities; parent and family organizations).
Be sure to provide copies of materials that your group develops. This might include lesson plans, school-wide, family involvement, community activity plans for targeted groups (e.g., preschool, K-2 grades, 3-5 grades, 6-8 grades, high school, young adults 16-21).
  - Include examples

**Key Considerations**
- Your budget is $25,000.
- School districts will provide the necessary staff and transportation needed for programming.
- Include special education programs and resources throughout the project.
- School districts will provide needed supplies.
- Participants will have had access to technology.
- School buildings and facilities can be utilized.
- Community buildings and facilities can be utilized.
- Connections with families and community agencies can be made.
- Focus on improving well-being and preventing challenges.
- Prepare a formal presentation and the share materials your team develops,
- Have fun!

**Timeline**
Announcement of Case Challenge – February 15, 2022
- Recording of tips for successful presentations available for interested teams – March 1, 2022
- Judges’ rubric will be available for interested teams – March 26, 2022
- Deadline to Sign up – April 1, 2022
- In person/Zoom Presentations – Saturday, April 9, 2022

**Prizes**
The top three teams will receive a cash prize:
- 1st place team - $1,000
- 2nd place team - $500
- 3rd place team - $250

Photo Op – winners with awards

**Final Deliverables**
- A visual presentation (such as PowerPoint) is required.
- Your team will deliver a 12-15 minute team presentation followed by 10 minutes of Q & A. This can be done in-person, via Zoom, or a combination of both.
- Your team will submit a 3-5 page report, with citations (use APA format) as a Word document or PDF. Include a description of how funds will be used.
- Your team also should include a one-page executive summary with their report.
- Provide copies of the materials that your team develops.
Judging Criteria

- Clear articulation of your plan/recommendations in a well prepared and delivered presentation.
- Strength of strategic idea(s).
- Illustration of how the idea can be integrated (e.g., as part of curriculum and instruction; part of after school-programming; including with family and community supports).
- Financial feasibility of suggested strategy.
- Original thinking, genuine insight, and potential for implementation.
- And remember to have fun. If you have fun, the judges will be engaged and have fun.

Rules

- You may use whatever resources are available while researching the project (as always, please have a reference list).
- If desired, a mentor (current practitioner) can be assigned to your team by request.
- Each team member is expected to present an approximately equal portion of the final representation.

For questions or more information, contact Janet Fox in the Office of Undergraduate and Teacher Education at foxja@indiana.edu.

Also, please let Janet know about who is on your team. If you are interested in forming a team of educators to participate, sign up: https://education.indiana.edu/machform/view.php?id=378216.

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Spring 2021 Case Challenge Winners

- First Place: Grace Barrett, Celeste Ovelton, Marlena Leininger, Claire Fletchall: I Am Enough - Project focused on expanding multiculturalism.

- Second Place: Jessica Missey, Joshua Pereira: TEAM - Project focused on decreasing bullying, adding social workers to classrooms.