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SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS KEEP YOUTH IN SCHOOL, OUT OF TROUBLE, AND SAFELY IN THE COMMUNITY

Wellness Initiative results announced at National Mental Health Awareness Day live telecast event at Phillip and Sala Burton High School celebrating youth thriving in the community

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Community Behavioral Health Services (CBHS)/San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF), and the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) announced positive student outcomes for the San Francisco Wellness Initiative, a school-based mental health partnership. The Wellness Initiative is one of several school partnerships offering free, confidential physical health, mental health, and substance abuse services to high school and middle school students. A new partnership, the Safe and Healthy Passages Program, established last fall seeks to expand mental health services in the middle schools and county community schools.

Local survey results have demonstrated an increased need for mental health services for middle and high school students. “We have seen a steady increase in the need for public mental health services for children and youth, with depression turning up as our most frequent diagnosis,” said Sai-Ling Chan-Sew, Director, Child, Youth and Family System of Care, CBHS/DPH. “Students are facing tremendous life challenges whether it’s academic pressure or community violence. School-based mental health partnerships have become a critical lifeline.”

Based on the 2005 Youth Risk Behavioral Health Surveillance (YRBS) Survey administered every other year to SFUSD high school students, 27% of students reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more during the last year. Fourteen percent of students said they had seriously thought about killing themselves, and 11% reported that they had tried. While San Francisco high school students were significantly less likely than youth across the nation to consider suicide, they were more likely to have attempted suicide and more likely to require medical attention after a suicide attempt.

Middle school students participated in the YRBS in 2006. An alarming 21% of middle school students reported that they had seriously thought about killing themselves, and 7.7% reported that they had tried – an increase compared to 19% and 6.7% respectively under the 2004 YRBS.

“Student wellness is a cornerstone for learning and educational success,” said Trish Bascom, SFUSD Associate Superintendent. “Students who receive services and supports through school-based mental health partnerships like the Wellness Initiative and Safe and Healthy Passages Program improve their academic achievement, attendance, and school connectedness.”

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**Community Behavioral Health Services/San Francisco Department of Public Health *
Department of Children, Youth and Their Families * San Francisco Unified School District**

The Wellness Initiative seeks to reduce harmful and high risk behaviors among youth and to promote strong physical and mental health. Services are provided through both on-campus programming and partnerships with over 40 community-based organizations. The Wellness Initiative is supported through a combination of funding provided by DCYF, SFUSD, and CBHS/DPH. The Burton High School Wellness Program was opened in May 2005.

In FY 2006-07, the Wellness Initiative served 4,825 students at eleven high schools according to an evaluation by ETR Associates. Students using Wellness services reported feeling better about themselves (82%), being better able to cope when things went wrong (75%), coming to school more often (76%), and doing better in school (64%). The Initiative expanded its successful program model to four new high schools at the start of the 2007-08 school year and anticipates reaching close to 6,000 students this year.

“The wonderful results of our evaluations show the power of providing services right where kids are, rather than in traditional medical settings,” said Margaret Brodtkin, Director of DCYF. “We collaborated with SFUSD and DPH eight years ago to create the first Wellness Program in response to requests from youth for greater access to services.”

Students reported high satisfaction with Wellness services with 97% of students reporting that staff treated them with respect; 88% reporting that there was an adult in the Wellness Program that really cared about them; and 93% feeling “heard and understood” by their Wellness counselor. Teachers also reported that students were better able to cope with stressors in the classroom and that Wellness helped students decrease their risky behavior.

To meet the mental health needs of middle school students, CBHS recently partnered with SFUSD on a new four-year, \$2.25 million U.S. Department of Education Safe and Healthy Passages Program grant to extend services to five middle schools and two county community schools. In the first five months of the grant, over 850 middle school students have received mental health services.

This is the third year that San Francisco has joined the Federal Government, States and local communities in raising public awareness about mental health and the importance of strong minds and healthy bodies to success in life. CBHS is the final year of an \$8 million Federal System of Care Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to expand mental health services to children, youth and their families in partnership with the school, foster care, and juvenile justice systems. This year, San Francisco was the System of Care site selected by SAMHSA to participate in a live telecast to Washington, D.C. Burton High School’s Team Liquid performed original spoken word poetry for the Washington, D.C. audience. In addition, Celebrity Bay Area rappers “Big Rich” and “San Quinn” performed songs. CBHS Children’s System of Care Youth Task Force Member Marquita Jones also premiered the digital story she produced about overcoming her life challenges and offered inspirational words on how youth can thrive in the community with the support of friends and access to services.

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