

MARCH 2024

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Intensive Wrap-Around Supports



Building Bridges in Dane County

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Building Bridges is a short-term, wrap-around school-based program in Dane County. The County established the program in 2014 after discussions with school personnel and community partners about the lack of mental health supports for students and families. In 2014, the program was piloted with 6 staff in the [Madison Metropolitan](#), [Verona Area](#), and [Sun Prairie Area](#) school districts. It now employs 30 direct service staff and serves 7 additional school districts in Dane County:

- DeForest
- Middleton-Cross Plains
- Mount Horeb
- Monona Grove
- Oregon
- Stoughton
- Waunakee

Building Bridges provides 90-day intensive wrap-around support to students with immediate mental health needs in 4K through 8th grade (and a limited number of 9th graders), along with their family and school team. The Building Bridges team consists of two professionals who provide crisis stabilization and prevention services. The primary objective of the Building Bridges program is to decrease mental health crisis events of students in the school setting and provide needed family supports to ensure the student's behavioral stability and readiness for learning. The team also works closely with school staff to improve their capacity to respond to mental health issues in the school setting. The program strives to increase student success by providing proactive responses to stressors, connect with needed resources, and improve school staff's understanding of mental health issues impacting students and families.



REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Each district determines which students to refer to Building Bridges. This is a collaborative effort between student services staff with the hope of prioritizing the students who are the most appropriate fit for the program as well as have the most time sensitive needs. After a student is identified, district staff explain the program to the student's parent/guardian and obtains their consent to refer to Building Bridges. Because Building Bridges is a wraparound program, we meet with school teams and families to determine goals and current mental health needs. We then work to connect students and families to needed community resources and mental health supports, as well as to communicate with school teams and students about supports to be put in place. We are working to create a bridge that allows schools and families to share important information and continue to be on the same page about the students' needs in all aspects of their lives.

UNIVERSAL APPROACHES

Our universal approaches for working with students and school teams include: trauma-informed care, individualized approaches, tiered interventions, skill building for students and staff, mental health literacy and wellness education for both families and school staff, and social emotional learning.

GOALS & OUTCOMES

The goal of our program is to build up supports that last beyond our 90 days.

Specific outcomes for each student depend on their unique goals.

Supports that we build may include:

- therapy connections
- school support plans
- visual supports for school & home
- financial resource connections
- increased school staff understanding and capacity
- further social connections
- extracurricular activities
- and others

Our program is unique because we understand that mental wellbeing is connected to health, resources, social opportunities, school engagement, and so much more.

Outcomes are measured by satisfaction surveys completed at the end of the program by school staff and by parents.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

**Dane County Dept.
of Human Services**

School Districts:

- DeForest
- Waunakee
- Community
- Mount Horeb
- Verona
- Stoughton
- Sun Prairie
- Oregon
- Monona Grove
- Madison
- Metropolitan

**District Student
Services Directors**

Catholic Charities



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FOCUS ON EQUITY

Building Bridges staff focus on the systemic barriers that families of color face in both the education system and in accessing care for their children. We work to overcome these barriers and have ongoing conversations to focus on equity for students and families.

Building Bridges recognizes that not all problems are the same, because individuals (staff, clients, families, communities) differ. Building Bridges strives to support families and schools through a culturally responsive problem-solving approach.

Not only this, but due to the parameters of our program being so wide, services being flexible, and the cost being free to families, we are often able to serve students and families that have not previously been able to—or presently cannot—connect to other programs due to lack of awareness, access, time, financial resources, transportation, necessary equipment, and more.

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Parents/guardians complete an evidence-based measurement tool focused on their child's well-being at intake, at closing, and six months after. Dane County Human Services and Catholic Charities have data on outcomes that can be provided on request.

It is 100% voluntary for a parent to participate in Building Bridges, which gives them choice and voice in their child's and family's well-being. If they agree to participate, parents are the driver in the Service Plan goals, which dictate the focus of the services received during the 90-day program. If at any point, a parent decides to discontinue services, they have this right. Collaboration between parents, school, and community partners is vital. We support parents in communicating with their child's school and getting involved with any supports put in place. Parents are also supported in their decisions as to what mental health services and community resources to access.

SUBMITTED BY

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*a partnership of the Coalition for Expanding
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