

New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S)

Program Overview: In response to the growing youth mental health and substance use epidemic, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) launched the New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services Program (NJ4S) to improve student mental health through a three-tiered support model: Universal Prevention, Evidenced-Based Prevention, and Assessment and Brief Clinical Intervention. The Mental Health Association (MHA) was selected to implement the program in Morris and Sussex Counties, collaborating with schools, families, and community partners to support youth mental health. NJ4S is low-barrier, easily accessible “hub and spoke” program where services are provided, but not limited to, schools, libraries, community centers, and family support organizations.

Location and Hours of Operation: NJ4S is located at 1160 Parsippany Blvd in Parsippany. Office hours are 9 AM to 5 PM; however, services are flexible and are provided according to the needs of the participants.

Personnel: The NJ4S staff consists of : 1 Program Director, 1 Assistant Director, 2 Supervising Prevention Consultants, 1 Marketing Specialist, 1 Data Analysis Specialist, 4 Licensed Clinicians, 12 Prevention Consultants, 2 Scheduling Coordinators, and 1 Administrative Assistant.

Performance Outcomes:

- **Tier 1 services, Universal Prevention:** During fiscal year 2024 NJ4S provided 199 universal prevention services, reaching 15,013 people, including students, parents/caregivers, school faculty, and community members. 90% of the services were local and the remaining 10% were statewide. 87% of the services were in-person, 11% virtual, and 1% was through an online resource. The top five delivered topics were on mental health, bullying & violence prevention, family well-being, positive relationships, and social media, respectively.
- **Tier 2 Services, Evidenced-Based Prevention:** NJ4S received 47 applications from 23 schools (11 from Morris County and 12 from Sussex County) for evidenced-based prevention services. 51% of applications were from high-need schools and 49% of applications were from moderate-need schools. A total of 1,958 people were served through Tier 2 services, including students, school faculty, and parents/caregivers. Tier 2 services requested were substance use prevention, suicide prevention, bullying & violence prevention, and classroom management.
- **Tier 3 Services, Assessment and Brief Clinical Intervention:** NJ4S received 77 applications for Tier 3 services from 14 schools (7 schools from each county- Morris & Sussex). NJ4S served 81 students from 6th to 12th grade through individual sessions and groups sessions. 94% of applications received were from high-need schools, 3% from moderate-need schools, and 3% from low-need schools. The reasons for services requests were mental health, absenteeism, classroom management, and social connections.

A total of 102 community referrals were made to 31 external agencies for additional services including: behavioral health, financial management/self-efficacy, legal assistance, medical/dental

services, mental health, parenting support/education, substance use, and support groups. Some of the community agencies NJ4S referred to were Atlantic Health Care's Behavioral Health Assessment Center, PerformCare, Zufall Health Center, The Center for Prevention and Counseling, and Saint Clare's Behavioral Health.

Program Highlights:

- During FY24, NJ4S reached over 17,000 people. Additionally, NJ4S exceeded the Department of Children & Families school engagement requirement. Due to the work of NJ4S staff, 68% of overall eligible schools are active in the state portal, Connex, and 60% of these schools submitted at least one application requesting service. Moreover, 67% of eligible high-need schools are active in portal, and 58% of the high-need school districts have submitted at least one application.
- NJ4S presented at 5 National Nights Out, 7 back-to-school fairs, and provided multiple professional development trainings for school personal and staff. NJ4S provided the first training at Roxbury High School on Mental wellness to school nurses on August 8th, 2023, prior to the start of the 2023-2024 school year. In response to the NJ4S community needs assessment, the prevention staff are certified in 14 different evidenced-based curricula: Routes to resilience, WhyTry, Safe Dates, Be Proud Be Responsible, SS Grin, Question Persuade Refer, Teen Outreach program, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Adult Mental Health First Aid, Edge-Sexual Health, Lion's Quest, Botvin Life Skills, Girls Social Connection Groups-Circle, Boys Council, Kevin Love Fund Social Emotional Learning.
- NJ4S launched a podcast titled, "The Protective Factor: Conversations that Inspire Hope and healing" which is available on YouTube and podcast platforms. Five episodes were recorded in the program's first year and covered topics such as how to talk to your child about trauma, and resiliency.
- NJ4S partnered with New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) to ensure coaches, student athletes, and their families were educated on the programming offered and how to access services. NJ4S Marketing Specialist worked with NJSIAA to create an eye-catching banner that was provided to schools. Participating schools were entered into a raffle, and images of students, athletic directors, and coaches hanging the banner were posted to NJ4S social media. Two winning schools received a donation to their athletic departments and 28 NJ4S/NJSIAA banners were hung in school gymnasiums and sports fields.
- Other highlights include creating a Tier 2/3 infographic flyer that was sent to all NJ4S-enrolled schools, NJ4S radio advertisements to run on local stations, "NJ4S Breakfast & Learn" with school representatives, and hosting a "Parent-to-Parent Group" to provide support to parents/caregivers. NJ4S also hosted two high school interns for six weeks; interns reported to the NJ4S program instead of attending school and participated in the youth sub-committee through the Hub Advisory Board, assisted with creating program materials, and captured important data.

Advisory Board: An instrumental part of NJ4S, the Hub Advisory Board, consists of 43 active members from local treatment providers, community organizations, school personal,

parents/caregivers, and youth. During fiscal year 2024, 11 advisory board meetings were held to discuss the needs of the community and ways NJ4S could respond to those needs. Four sub-committees were formed through the Advisory Board - Youth, Parent/Caregiver, Data, and Community Relations - which increased community engagement and service selection.

Marketing And Promotion: Marketing and promotion was an essential aspect to the implementation of the NJ4S program. Throughout the year, NJ4S promoted its programming on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Through the use of these platforms, NJ4S posted 269 times, had 36,528 impressions, and 447 views.