LEARNING SUMMARY:
Rising Practices & Policies in the Workforce | ***Recruitment and Retention in the Mental Health and School Mental Health Workforce***

About the 2022 Rising Practices & Policies Learning Series

In the Spring and Summer of 2022, the Pacific Southwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network (MHTTC) brought together regional leaders and implementers in a four-part learning series on emerging issues for the mental health and school mental health workforce with the goal of identifying considerations and elevating promising practices.

Session 4: The Woes and Wonders of Recruitment and Retention in the Mental Health and School Mental Health Workforce

» **View the Webinar Recording Here**

Our region is experiencing a huge rise in need for mental health services in our communities and schools, and at the same time, experiencing a large attrition rate of providers—a situation that predated the pandemic but has been exacerbated by its effects. Beginning with the premise that issues of recruitment and attrition can be better framed as a *shortcoming of systems, rather than a staffing shortage*, this session addressed strategies for cultivating a healthy and sustainable school mental health workforce.[1] Highlights from the panelists and group discussion, along with resources shared, are presented below.

About the 2022 Rising Practices & Policies Learning Series

Considerations	Rising Practices and Strategies	Resources
It is necessary to shift policy and funding to achieve sustainable improvements in the availability and retention of school mental health professionals.	• States can enact policy—coupled with funding—that codifies nationally recommended staffing ratios and aligns pipeline programs and hiring accordingly. Examples of pipeline programs include: awareness campaigns about the school mental health field; health academies and dual credit programs for high school students; undergraduate minors in school-based mental health; and pathways from undergraduate to graduate degrees. • States can align licensing requirements and opportunities with school mental health workforce needs. For example: access to licensure for psychological services assistants (PSAs) to support administrative tasks and allow more time for counselors to work directly with students; and offering fully integrated pathways to licensure for clinicians along with school counseling credentials like the Pupil Personnel Services Credential (PPSC). • States can promote staff retention by codifying and funding educational stipends, loan forgiveness/ repayment, and hazard pay.	State Strategies to Recruit and Retain the Behavioral Health Workforce National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Workforce Resource Guide High School Health Career Pathway (California) ARTERY Pipeline Framework (Nevada)

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Considerations	Rising Practices and Strategies	Resources
It is critical to support the mental health of staff, including school mental health professionals and educators. Educators and school mental health staff are experiencing high levels of burnout, vicarious trauma, emotional exhaustion, and moral injury.[2] *"When staff are not ok, students are not ok."*	• Stakeholders can advocate for federal and state policy and funding to support educators' mental health.[3] • States/counties/districts can ensure educators and school mental health staff have access to mental health supports. These services should be highly visible and easy to access. An innovative approach for larger counties is to develop an employee assistance program specifically for educators and other school staff. • Counties/districts can provide training for educational leadership on how to facilitate cultures of wellbeing for their schools. • Districts/schools can use reflective supervision to support clinical and non-clinical staff in preventing burnout and vicarious trauma. • Districts/schools can offer training in trauma and crisis intervention (e.g., suicide prevention training, Youth Mental Health First Aid) for all levels of staff. • In a more upstream strategy, states/universities can revise curricula for teaching and counseling programs to better prepare professionals to respond to trauma and require trauma-informed continuing education courses.	Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Workers Throughout and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic In-house employee assistance program (LA County) Using Reflective Supervision to Support Trauma-Informed Systems for Children
Supporting staff wellbeing and retention requires a multi-faceted approach that includes support, experience, flexibility, and compensation.	• Counties/districts can *support* staff by building strong management and leadership that foster diversity, safety, belonging, dignity, and trust; fostering connections through mentorship programs; and, on a system level, by designing and funding school mental health teams so staff can reasonably fulfill their roles without burnout. • Counties/districts can further staff *experience* by offering pre-license supervision; providing training on current and emerging needs; and funding educational stipends for career advancement and/or licensure. • Counties/districts can offer *flexibility* via benefits such as family leave policies, support for family-building/reproductive benefits, and flexibility in schedules and remote work. • States/counties can change policy to provide *compensation* that honors the nature of the work and enables staff to live in the areas in which they work.	State Strategies to Recruit and Retain the Behavioral Health Workforce State Strategies to Increase Diversity in the Behavioral Health Workforce

[2] *State Strategies to Recruit and Retain the Behavioral Health Workforce.* (2023b, March 30). https://www.ncsl.org/health/state-strategies-to-recruit-and-retain-the-behavioral-health-workforce

[3] Stanford, L. (2023, February 10). *Educators' Mental Health Gets New Attention in Federal Bill.* Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/educators-mental-health-gets-new-attention-in-federal-bill/2023/02

What current issues is our region facing related to recruitment and retention of mental health and school mental health professionals?

Federal and state legislation has been passed to increase funding for school mental health programs and workforce.[4] Many states, counties, and school districts have developed promising programs to support career pathways and staff retention. While the topic of workforce recruitment and retention is far-reaching, several current issues include:

- How counties/districts are handling immediate staffing gaps, given that pipeline programs will take time to generate the desired supply of workers.
- Success stories and strategies for increasing compensation for school mental health staff.
- Unique strategies to meet workforce needs in Native communities and the islands that are part of our region, where staffing needs may be even more severe.
- A deeper dive into hiring and retention of staff who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

[4] *The Landscape of School-Based Mental Health Services.* (2022b, September 6). KFF. https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/the-landscape-of-school-based-mental-health-services/