Mental health in AR students:  
A priority in search of a plan

Arkansas School Boards Association  
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Today’s reality

- AR students, background
  - 37% from single parent homes
  - 22% from low income homes ($25,000 for 4)
  - 28% have parents who lack secure employment
  - 5% experience significant abuse or neglect
  - 13,000 homeless
  - 64% free or reduced lunch

From Annie E. Casey Foundation

- Traumatic events / experiences - deaths, bullying, incarceration of parents, major illness

- Academically,
  - 3rd graders: 57% not “Ready” in literacy, 40% not “Ready” in math
  - 10th graders: 56% not “Ready” in literacy, 70% not “Ready” in math

From ADE’s My School Info website
Mental health needs and services

- 23% of AR high school students are bullied
  *From: Nat’l Ctr for Educational Statistics*

- Depressive symptoms - 40% of AR adolescents have depressive symptoms severe enough to stop usual activities (approx 17,000 don’t get help)

- Suicidal ideation & attempts – 23% consider, 16% attempt
  *From: US Dept of Health & Human Services (2017)*

- AR has lowest percentage of students identified as having an Emotional Disturbance for special education services (1.9%)

- Services – School psychologists, School counselors, School-based mental health providers, Community-based mental health providers
Consider your school’s culture / climate

- **Culture** – norms, beliefs, practices, policies, expectations
- **Climate** – temperature, conditions
- How do we do things here?
- Do we...
  - Value everyone’s contribution?
  - Encourage all?
  - Model respect and expect it?
  - Collaborate productively?
  - Look for ways to improve?
  - Assess culture / climate?
You have a choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REACTIVE</th>
<th>PROACTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It won’t happen here.”</td>
<td>“It is only a matter of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let events set our agenda</td>
<td>Taking control of our agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act when problem occurs</td>
<td>Take action before problem occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address immediate problem</td>
<td>More time to focus on trends or common problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move from crisis to crisis</td>
<td>Decision making is less pressured and calmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making is under time pressure</td>
<td>Emotions less of a factor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions tend to be high</td>
<td>AKA: prevention</td>
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What did you expect?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>When we are PROACTIVE</th>
<th>When we are REACTIVE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We focus on addressing needs.</td>
<td>• We focus on immediate solution.</td>
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<td>• Our analysis of situation is more thorough – can address many possible issues.</td>
<td>• Our analysis of the situation is damage control with specific situation</td>
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<td>• We feel confident that we are preventing or at least reducing problems.</td>
<td>• We feel confident that we can handle the exact same problem a little better next time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stakeholder communication and relationships are improved.</td>
<td>• Communication and relationships can suffer.</td>
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Key tenets to Proactive/Preventative approach

- Team structure
- Regular and quality communication
- Understand current needs
- Align work with vision/mission of school
- Data-driven – establish baseline, monitor, & evaluate
- Use high-quality, established methods
Team structure – why?

- Identify major stakeholders
- Roughly 5-7 total in number

- Select productive, hard working, principled yet flexible, and committed representative(s) from each stakeholder group

- Needs active support by administration
- Identify who is primary point of contact & decision maker for school?

- Needs respect of all school staff
- Tasks: Plans, documents, implements, evaluates
Regular / Quality Communication – why?

- Regular meeting time / place
- Clearly defined purpose

- Establish meeting procedures
  (leadership, documentation, time keeping)

- Create ground rules for discussion
  and decision making (consensus, majority)
Good communication is essential to all relationships!
Understanding current needs – why?

- Use current demographic data to understand characteristics of students in school
- What are primary risk factors or concerns?
- To what degree are staff educated on mental health issues?
- Conduct mental health screening with students to assess needs
- What are our current resources and how are they used?

“Our goal is to turn data into information, and information into insight”
Carly Fiorina
Align work with school vision and mission – why?

- What are the school’s vision and mission?
- How do needs fit with vision and mission?
- What will our resources allow us to do?
Data-driven process – Why?

- Need to know our starting point to establish a desired end point
- Need plan that incorporates collection of data to determine effectiveness
- Need established time frame and expected outcomes to determine if we need to change methods
- We need data we can AND WILL use!

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”
Benjamin Franklin
High quality and established methods – Why?

- Research what has worked for others
- Matching our needs with methods to address those needs
- Universal level (aka primary prevention) = build belonging & resiliency, focus on education
- At-risk or Selected level (aka secondary prevention) = who is at risk and needs additional supports
- Targeted or Indicated level (aka tertiary intervention) = problem has occurred, reduce risk for reoccurrence
- Each level has unique needs
- AASA’s Innovative Successful Practice Project
- AR Center for School Safety
- Evidence Based Intervention Network
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Association of School Resource Officers
- National Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support
- RTI Action Network
- Successful Practices Network
Questions? Answers? Comments?

Thank you!

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