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The Georgia Apex Project: Increasing Access to Intensive Mental Health Services through Community Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

- An estimated one in five youth ages 13-18 has a diagnosable mental health problem; approximately half have unmet mental health needs.
- School-based mental health (SBMH) programs are a strategy for minimizing barriers to accessing needed services.
- In an effort to build infrastructure for SBMH services and increase access to mental health care for students, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities developed the Georgia Apex Project (GAP).
- Through this pilot, which ran the duration of the 2015-2016 school year, community mental health providers across Georgia partnered with school districts and local schools in their service area to provide intensive mental health services in the school setting.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this poster is to present qualitative and quantitative results from the ongoing evaluation of the project, including program successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

STUDY DESIGN

The study population for GAP is 29 community mental health providers in Georgia. Provider agencies contracted with between one and fifteen school partners serving elementary, middle and high school youth. The three objectives of the project were to:

- Increase access to mental health services
- Increase early detection of mental health disorders
- Increase sustained community collaboration between mental health providers and schools

GAP’s objectives are examined using qualitative and quantitative data collected from provider agencies monthly.

DATA ELEMENTS

- Students referred and served
- Students visiting a MH provider for the first time
- Services provided
- Billing mechanisms
- Student demographics
- Program characteristics
- Geographical location
- Number of schools served
- School and community climate
- Training and community events
- School and community events
- Attending school events, such as PTA meetings, school administration meetings, and school staff meetings
- Holding community forums with stakeholders, school officials, and local representatives of state agencies
- Conducting trainings with school staff, such as Youth Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Prevention
- Geographical location
- Number of schools served
- School and community climate
- Medicaid CMO
- Medicaid/CHIP FFS
- Private Insurance
- State Behavioral Health FFS
- Other Government
- Other

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY OR PRACTICE

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SBMH programs such as GAP are a building avenue for providing mental health services to children and reducing access barriers faced by children and families across the country. Lessons learned from Georgia’s investment in SBMH can be applied to other providers, jurisdictions, and states wishing to implement this type of program.

CONCLUSION

Over the project period, GAP providers have successfully achieved the three objectives associated with the project. GAP has increased access to mental health services for students of all ages, increased early detection of students with mental health issues by allowing students to receive mental health services for the first time, and encouraged community collaboration between mental health providers, local schools, school staff members, and school districts, and other community organizations.

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