



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

RESOURCE

Organizational Mental Health Literacy Reflection for Schools

Introduction

Besides promoting the individual health literacy of students and staff, schools have an opportunity to be health literate as organizations, since individual health outcomes are also impacted by the systems they interact with. **Organizational health literacy** is the ability of an organization, like a school, to equitably enable people to find, understand, and use information and services when making decisions about and taking action to support their health and the health of others (CDC 2023). The idea of organizational health literacy has primarily been applied to healthcare settings; however, given the integral role that schools play in educating students about health and connecting students to and providing health services, it follows that organizational health literacy is an important characteristic of healthy schools (Kirchhoff et al. 2022). This approach acknowledges that to strengthen health literacy, schools need to address environmental factors that impact the competence, behavior, and health of students, caregivers, and staff (Okan et. al 2020).

The same idea can be applied to mental health. Focusing on organizational mental health literacy of schools means using a settings-based approach to increasing well-being by considering how school and district conditions impact the mental health literacy of members of the school-community (Kirchhoff 2022). School leaders can build their organizational mental health literacy with policies and practices that increase student's and staff's ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform mental health-related decisions and actions.

Instructions

Gather a team of representative staff with a variety of roles across the school and district. Reflect on the following questions to identify areas of strength and opportunities to improve the school environment and promote mental health literacy in the school-community in the four components of mental health literacy: skills to build and maintain positive mental health, ability to seek help and provide support to others who may be struggling, mental health stigma reduction, and mental health knowledge. This can inform the improvement process laid out in the [School Mental Health Improvement Guide: Building Mental Health Literacy](#). The team completing this reflection may wish to incorporate questions and considerations from DPI's [Equity Mindset Cards](#) as they work through the reflection. The cards combine key mindsets and resources for sustainable, practical change.

1. How does the school district share information related to mental health offerings included in employee benefits packages, how to use them, and the flexible ways staff can access care (in-person, telehealth, etc.)?
2. What opportunities do all students have to increase their mental health literacy? What opportunities do all staff have to increase their mental health literacy?
3. What protocols are in place to support staff who experience secondary or tertiary trauma on the job?
4. How do school staff share individual mental health information with students and caregivers with a variety of levels of health literacy, such as universal mental health screening results, student progress in early intervention and treatment supports, etc.?
5. How do school staff provide information and support to students and caregivers with a variety of levels of mental health literacy when a student is referred for mental health services?

6. Do school and district leaders understand mental health and feel comfortable talking about topics such as stress, burnout, self-care, and compassion resilience?

7. Do school staff feel comfortable talking about mental health with their students and other staff?

8. How do leaders create a climate where talking about mental health is normalized and destigmatized?

9. What opportunities exist for students and staff to share stories of recovery and resilience?

10. What district policies are in place to promote staff and student well-being?

11. How do school and district leaders model prioritizing well-being in the workplace?

12. Has the school district engaged in resource mapping to identify the mental health resources and supports available in the school and in the community? If so, how is the resource map shared with students, caregivers, and staff? Is it accessible to all?

13. Does the school district have a formalized mental health referral pathway? How does the district communicate to students, staff, and caregivers how to access the referral pathway?

14. How does the school district center student and caregiver voice in decisions about what is included in the continuum of school mental health supports? In individual student planning?

15. Does the district mission and vision include student and staff well-being and approach mental health as a community asset?

References

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