



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER: School-Based Mental Health



According to Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, the challenges that young people face are “unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate.” School aged children and youth are often confronted with increasing pressures socially, academically and emotionally. Through BHRS, students are able to receive behavioral health support specific to their needs while also continuing their education. BHRS providers are dedicated to equipping youth with the necessary resources and support for a healthy future!

BHRS School-Based Mental Health Overview

The School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) team, part of the BHRS Youth System of Care, is dedicated to identifying students with serious mental illness and connecting them to behavioral health services, ensuring they can maintain their classroom instruction. The program supports 20 school districts and charter schools across San Mateo County, operating as a contracted provider rather than a traditional outpatient clinic.

Led by Manager Jason Kimbrough and four supervisors—Karen Feliciano (North), Tatiana Figueroa (Central and Coast), Claire Tracey (Therapeutic Day School programs) and Gaby Perez (South and East Palo Alto)—the SBMH team provides clinical assessments, talk, art and play therapy and case management services. In fiscal year 2023-2024, 317 students were served, with about 80% of participants eligible for Medi-Cal.

The school-based clinicians bring a wealth of expertise in delivering a comprehensive range of Specialty Mental Health services tailored to students' needs. They provide direct support and, for those eligible, facilitate referrals and collaborate with higher-level care providers, including Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) and Wraparound. Meeting primarily in schools, these talented clinicians also support families at home and in the community to ensure a holistic approach to mental health support that fosters positive outcomes for students.

TBS: A short-term, intensive program that offers individualized 1:1 behavioral support in the community and home for youth with unsafe and disruptive behaviors.
Wraparound: A collaborative, strengths based approach to planning care.

The SBMH program reduces stigma and disparities for special education students and their caregivers by enhancing classroom inclusion, offering psychoeducation and fostering communication between clinicians and educators to address individual needs.

By Jason Kimbrough, manager of the BHRS School-Based Mental Health team.

Canyon Oaks and Its One-Room School

Canyon Oaks Youth Center is a BHRS co-ed residential treatment facility offering comprehensive therapeutic services to youth (ages 12 to 18, or up to 19 if a non-minor dependent) to help regain their mental and emotional stability. Youth are referred to Canyon Oaks through Child and Family Services or Juvenile Probation. Regardless of where it is a child resides, that child must continue their education – including at a mental health facility. This is where the San Mateo County Office of Education comes in. My name is George Rehmet and I am the teacher at the school at Canyon Oaks, which can best be described as a one-room classroom. I currently work with eight students and teach all subjects, including English, social studies, math, science and physical education. As all the students are in special education, I wear the special educator hat as well.

There is a full team at work at the one-room school here at Canyon Oaks. I am assisted by my very capable and caring paraeducator Jose Giacomani, pictured here to the left of me in the Canyon Oaks classroom. As the paraeducator, Jose follows the teacher's lead and works with students individually or in small groups and helps with the planning and preparation of school lessons and materials. There is also a school counselor that meets with the students about once a month as a credit recovery teacher to help our high school students who are behind in their school credits.



The students face many challenges, including mental and emotional challenges. Many students experience learning disabilities and may lack foundational concepts, often due to excessive absences from school and/or difficulties focusing on instruction due to the issues they are managing. I currently have eighth grade students testing at 12th grade levels in math and reading to 12th graders who are testing at third grade levels in reading. Therefore, it is a balance between meeting the students' emotional needs and helping to develop their academic skills. As school staff we prioritize mental health first. For example, I will stop an academic lesson if a student appears to be struggling. Jose or myself will then check in with the student and work with that student to utilize their skills that they learned in therapy groups to maintain in the classroom. In addition, school staff will check-in frequently with students and give constant feedback on their positive social-emotional skills.

Despite the obstacles, I have been supported by the Canyon Oaks staff, supervisors, residential counselors and therapists. The school and Canyon Oaks staff work strongly together. I have seen a majority of eighth graders get promoted and high school seniors graduate with their diplomas and most students show growth in reading and math scores. Finally, what helps to get me through some of the challenging moments are the former students who have contacted me to say how well they are doing and to say “thank you.”

By George Rehmet. This is George's 10th year teaching at Canyon Oaks. He's been teaching for over 30 years and has been with San Mateo County Office of Education since 2006.

United for Youth Vision 2030, Blueprint for School and Transition Age Youth Well-being

In 2023, through The Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities, San Mateo County Health and the County Superintendent of Schools Nancy Magee launched a year-long, equity focused strategic planning process for mental wellness, aimed at supporting the county's school and transition age youth. From this planning process emerged the United for Youth Vision 2030, a 6-year plan designed to enhance youth behavioral health and well-being. The plan was developed in partnership with over 20 public agencies and community-based organizations, supported by Supervisors Noelia Corzo and David Pine. Funding from Sequoia and Peninsula Health Care Districts was also made available for this effort. The plan also integrates feedback from youth, parents and caregivers to create a strategic action plan aimed at improving access and equity in mental health services for youth and transitional-aged individuals.

United for Youth Vision 2030 has established five key priorities:

1. **Expand** prevention and educational initiatives that promote social and emotional well-being.
2. **Enhance** early identification of youth behavioral health needs and improve access to services.
3. **Increase** access to a comprehensive range of youth-centered behavioral health treatment options.
4. **Invest** in both the existing and emerging behavioral health workforce, emphasizing diversity and sustainability.
5. **Leverage** available public and private funding and other resources.

The official launch of United for Youth Vision 2030 occurred on September 30, 2024, marking the beginning of a series of implementation activities. Upcoming events include a communication rollout by the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) in October and the United for Youth Symposium in November. In January 2025, educational webinars will equip partners with strategies for effective implementation, followed by a summit focused on youth behavioral health in February 2025.

With a commitment of \$500,000 annually for three years from the County Board of Supervisors, along with additional resources from SMCOE and local school districts, this initiative is well-positioned to make a lasting impact. Next steps will include raising public awareness, securing additional funding and developing metrics to monitor progress. United for Youth Vision 2030 represents a unified effort to advocate for youth mental health and foster sustainable change for future generations. I want to extend my gratitude to all our BHRS staff and community partners for their invaluable contributions to this initiative and strategic plan.

By Ziomara Ochoa-Rodriguez, deputy director of child/youth services at BHRS. For more detailed information on United for Youth 2030, please visit www.smcoe.org/U4Y.

Addressing the Behavioral Health Workforce Crisis: Daly City Youth Health Center's Innovative Approach

As the Bay Area grapples with a rising cost of living, the Daly City Youth Health Center (DCYHC) has emerged as a beacon of hope and innovation in addressing the behavioral health workforce crisis. For over 30 years, DCYHC has provided essential mental health services, primary care, substance use prevention and health education to residents of North San Mateo County. With a steadfast commitment to supporting youth and their families, DCYHC is actively working to tackle the challenges of workforce recruitment and retention through strategic initiatives that enhance training and promote long-term employment in the field.

Understanding the Challenge

The behavioral health sector is facing unprecedented recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in finding diverse providers who can effectively reflect and serve the community's demographics. As mental health needs escalate, the demand for qualified professionals continues to outpace supply, making it increasingly difficult to deliver adequate services. This crisis not only impacts service delivery but also threatens the sustainability of community organizations that rely on a skilled workforce to meet local youth needs. DCYHC's strategy includes:

A Comprehensive Internship Program: Designed to cultivate the next generation of behavioral health professionals. The internship program emphasizes quality training in several key areas: intensive clinical training, peer education and outreach and substance use intervention.

Strengthening Community Partnerships: DCYHC has established strong partnerships with several educational institutions, including San Francisco State University and the University of San Francisco. These relationships bolster recruitment efforts by facilitating connections with passionate students eager for real-world experience in behavioral health.

Retaining Talent Through Support and Growth: The retention of skilled interns and staff is equally critical to DCYHC's mission. The organization fosters a supportive and inclusive culture characterized by ongoing professional development, inclusive agency culture, job placement opportunities and youth leadership programs.



With a focus on family engagement, collaborative practices and an innovative approach, DCYHC is not only addressing the current workforce crisis but also shaping a brighter future for behavioral health care in our community.



This article is summarized; visit the [BHRS Blog](#) for the full version.

By Anya Shapiro, executive director of DCYHC. For more information on DCYHC and its programs, visit [DCYHC's website](#) or email DCYHC@jeffersonunion.net. Together, we can build a healthier community for our youth and beyond.