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Gaps form as youth mental health challenges rise

BY MICHAEL STANDAERT
ND News Cooperative

With over two decades as a counselor in Langdon-area schools in rural Cavalier County and as a clinical counselor with Catholic Charities, Barbara Boesl has seen shifts in youth mental health.

Anxiety has supplanted depression as a primary diagnosis for those struggling, both on the youth and adult side, she believes.

“My belief is that (increase in anxiety) is connected to the lack of real connections,” Boesl said. “In the smartphones, that is a connectedness that’s not really connected. It’s so easy to go into distraction, but we crave real, true connection.”

That disconnectedness has been a long time coming as smartphones and other screens dominate the lives of so many at work, at home and during social interaction. The pandemic supercharged screen use, for better and for worse.

A new study from the non-profit group Kids Count North Dakota released in September finds that mental health conditions for youth have worsened in the past five years, with 23% of children and adolescents in the state suffering from one or more mental health conditions.

More than 35% of high school youth in North Dakota reported feeling sad or hopeless each day for more than a two-week period last year, and 18% of high school students seriously considered suicide in 2023, according to the data.

There are many more variables besides screen time alone, however. Those can range from issues with bullying, to insecure home environments that may include abuse or addiction, to poor diets or lack of nutrition, to sedentary lifestyles, to a sense of isolation from family and friends.

Widening gaps

The report also found gaps for youth in accessing mental health services in the state.

A total of 21 counties have no mental health providers specifically working with youth and 46 counties have mental health care worker shortages. That means fewer social workers, clinical counselors and school psychologists available to see kids with the greatest needs.

Due to those gaps, youth often rely on school counselors or other teachers for mental health support.

A total of 35 counties do not meet the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio of one counselor to 250 students. This leaves around 87% of students in North Dakota’s public schools underserved.

Nick Archuleta, president of educator advocacy group North Dakota United, said he believes schools in the state don’t have enough counselors and most have a wide range of duties besides meeting with youth with emotional, behavioral or socialization issues.

Many, particularly in the high schools, also counsel on career and college choices, proctor tests and hold other titles within a school.

“North Dakota’s school districts are under increasing pressure to recruit counselors and social workers given the increasing range of issues that young people are bringing to school,” Archuleta said. “In many cases, schools are hard-pressed to find qualified individuals to work in their schools as there is a shortage of individuals entering that profession.”

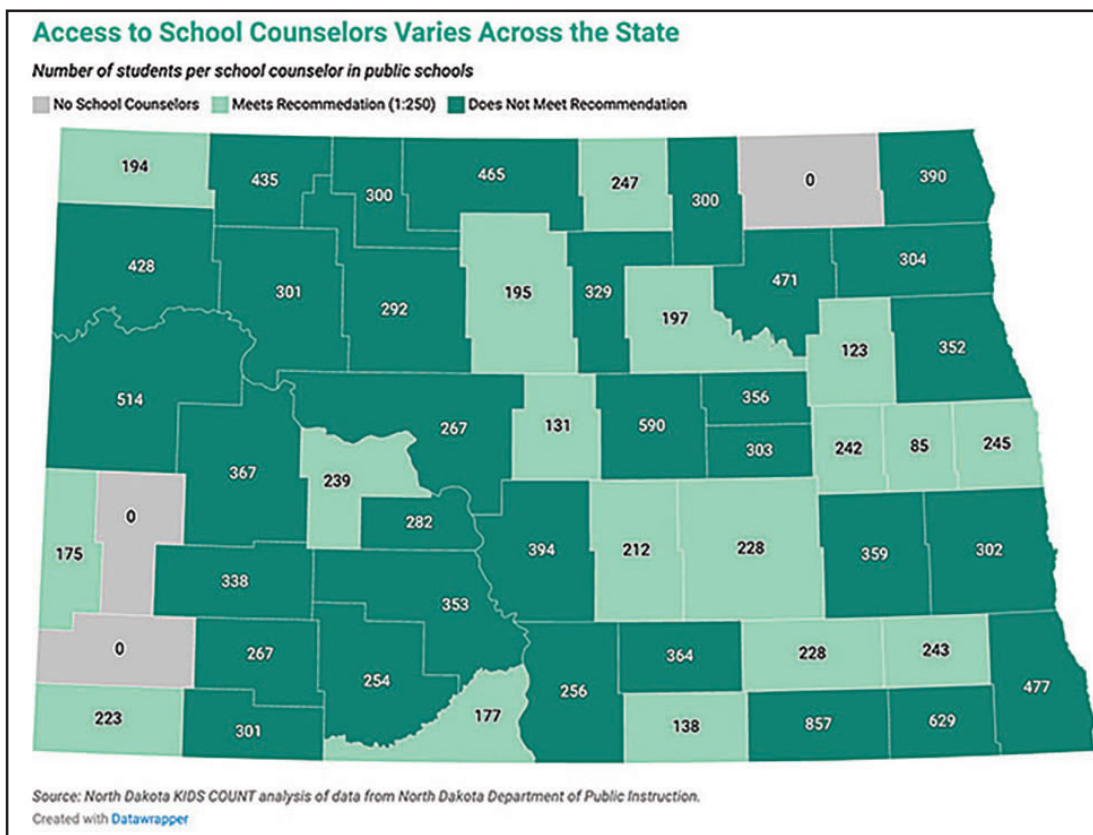
Archuleta said this can be addressed in the upcoming legislative session and hopes policymakers can find ways to incentivize that career path.

Jered Bollom, president of the North Dakota School Counselor Association and elementary school principal in Elgin, as well as the lone K-12 school counselor in Grant County, said more needs to be done to increase the number of people training to become school counselors.

Currently only four higher education programs in the state offer school counselor training. One of those programs recently had no students, and another is fully online so offers limited in-person experience, he said.

Like Boesl, Bollom has seen changes in the youth mental health landscape over his past decade as a counselor, particularly in the pandemic period.

“To some degree, what we’re



This graphic shows the number of school counselors there are to students across North Dakota using 2023 data. A check with Cavalier County found that they do now have a counselor in the school system there. A total of 35 counties do not meet the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio of one counselor to 250 students.

finding is that isolationism has been a big thing,” Bollom said.

It has been harder to get people back together and have kids open up after the pandemic, he said.

Bollom said it is important for families to teach digital citizenship to their kids and be role models for positive screen use; otherwise kids will mirror the behaviors of their parents.

“It’s an amazing machine that you can hold in your hands, but the responsibility with that is intense,” Bollom said.

Ideally the state could increase the numbers of social workers and school psychologists along with school counselors to form a three-pillar system of support for those with mental health challenges, he said.

Nationally, a bipartisan act called the Mental Health Excellence in Schools Act aimed at increasing the pipeline for individuals training to become school psychologists, counselors and social workers by covering some graduate program costs was introduced in the Senate in 2021. The act was reintroduced in 2023, but has so far not gotten traction.

US Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND), whose own son Ian Cramer has suffered high-profile mental health and addiction issues, supported the reintroduction of the act in May of last year.

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING MINNEWAUKAN SCHOOL BOARD April 15, 2024

A regular meeting of the Minnewaukan School Board was held April 15, 2024. Members present: Curt Hanson, Dave Ambers, Leona LaRoque. Members absent: Anna Tice and Michele Anderson. Others present: Superintendent Jean Callahan, High School Principal David Mahon, Elementary Principal MacKenzie Moen, Business Manager Tracie Volk, and Jay Howard.

The meeting was called to order by Ambers at 4:30 p.m.

Agenda -- Add fund transfer to Old Business. A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the agenda with addition. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Delegations and Communications -- None.

Minutes -- A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the minutes with correction. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Bills -- A motion was made by LaRoque, seconded by Hanson, to approve the bills. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

GENERAL FUND	
TMS	\$73.47
ND Telephone Co.	1,047.89
Stein's	2,977.53
Otter Tail Power Co.	12,208.77
CenDak	8,378.90
BC Farmers Press	138.75
Hartley's School Buses	1,851.37
Advanced Business	
Methods	2,408.62
City of Minnewaukan	1,503.00
Frontline Education	2,131.19
ND E-Waste, LLC	141.34
Cole Papers	567.91
Athletic Performance	
Solutions	2,780.00
Altru	95.00
Cummins	1,459.28
Devils Lake Journal	399.00
Johnson Controls	3,306.31
Summit Fire Protection	800.00
Popplers	153.85
Century Electric	1,124.19
BC Real Estate Taxes	729.56
Bremer Credit Card	5,763.15
Fund Total	\$50,039.08

HOT LUNCH FUND	
US Foods	\$12,395.98
Bremer Credit Card	9.89
Fund Total	\$12,405.87

ACTIVITIES FUND	
Bremer Cridt Card	\$635.35
Fund Total	\$635.35

Financial Reports -- A motion was made by LaRoque, seconded by Hanson, to approve the financial reports. All members present voted

yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Old Business --

Second Reading of Policies: A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the second reading of the following policies: Parent and Family Engagement Policy, Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy, Virtual Learning Because of Weather or Other Conditions, Bullying Policy, Education of Homeless Students. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Fund Transfer: A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the transfer of \$500,000 from the general fund to the money market. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

New Business --

Approve Contracts: A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the remaining signed contracts. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Resignation: A motion was made by LaRoque, seconded by Hanson, to approve the resignation of Shelby Adam. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Policy Work: A motion was made by Hanson, seconded by LaRoque, to approve the first reading of the Foster Care Policy. All members present voted yes. The motion carried with a 3-0 vote.

Principal Reports -- High School Principal Mahon reported on: enrollment, PT conferences 4/16, state testing, teacher observation/evaluations complete, mid-term 4/17, activities update, Miss North Dakota assembly 5/7, Stuart James 5/9, graduation 5/17.

Elementary Principal Moen reported on: caramel rolls with caregivers 4/23, Star Lab presentation 4/12, family engagement activities, school improvement meeting 4/22, spring concert 4/26 at 1:30 p.m., carnival 4/30 from 5 to 7 p.m., NDSA update--celebration assembly 5/6 at 2:45 p.m., Play Day 5/8.

Superintendent Report: Graduation, new bus purchase, construction project, NESC meeting. Next meeting: May 20, 2024 at 4:30 p.m.

A motion was made by LaRoque, seconded by Hanson, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

Tracie Volk
Business Manager

Michele Anderson
President

safe, supportive parents,” Seidler said. “It just continues to say that we could do a lot more for helping our kids in the state.”

One low-hanging fruit Seidler and Burg noted could make a difference would be addressing food insecurity.

“Food security is what I’ve come across as maybe the big, easy solution for a lot of good,” Seidler said. A recent nationwide survey of one million post-9/11 veterans showed how addressing food insecurity significantly reduced suicidal ideation among that group, Seidler pointed out.

On a more elemental level, simply finding connection and reducing isolation could go a long way toward addressing mental health challenges both for youth and adults, Boesl said.

That means quality time over meals and bonding as a family without being glued to a screen.

“I do think the family unit, the family systems, is where we need some help, and that’s where some of the trouble is,”

Boesl said. “Just eating that meal together, without your phone. If I could prescribe that for everybody, I would.”

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide or is in crisis, call or text 9-8-8 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The ND News Cooperative is a non-profit news organization providing reliable and independent reporting on issues and events that impact the lives of North Dakotans. The organization increases the public’s access to quality journalism and advances news literacy across the state. For more information about NDNC or to make a charitable contribution, please visit newscoopnd.org.

St. Vincent de Paul donations

St. Vincent de Paul Church in Leeds is seeking donations for upkeep of the cemetery and the tree replacement project. In addition, they are updating the contact list for families with loved ones buried there. The contact person for the cemetery is Tammy Meyer. She can be reached at 701-466-2681 for questions or information. Donations can be sent to Tammy Meyer, 5125 49th Ave. NE, York, ND 58386.

Crossword answers

- ACROSS: 1. Consumer 5. Tasty
7. Oil 9. Orders
DOWN: 1. Crust 2. Scant 3. Meal
4. Ramen 6. Your 8. TO



Food Distribution Farmers Market

BY LOTTIE CALDWELL

Fort Totten’s food distribution hosted yet another successful farmers market. The event features vibrant fresh foods cultivated by the community. This event also hosts vendors whose creations of decadent treats and dazzling accessories will satisfy community members and keep them as recurring customers. These events happen frequently and help support local vendors who want to share their hard-earned skills with those around them.



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