

12th Annual Conference Summary: Orlando, Florida, October 25-27, 2007

The 12th Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health was held in ChampionsGate, Florida near Orlando from October 25th to 27th, 2007. The conference, sponsored by the Center for School Mental Health (CSMH) in collaboration with the IDEA Partnership, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs housed at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), was held at the Orlando Omni Resort. The theme of the 12th Annual conference was “What Works in Schools: Sustaining a National Community of Practice on School Mental Health.” The conference offered an opportunity for participants to gain knowledge, skills, and new connections to others interested in advancing mental health in schools. In addition to the pool and beautiful grounds at the hotel, participants enjoyed visiting the outlet malls and Downtown Disney. There was plenty to keep attendees engaged in the conference throughout the day, as this conference continued to make great strides in advancing our shared work through the National Community of Practice on Collaborative School Behavioral Health.

For the second year, the conference proceedings were guided by the Community, with specialty tracks for each of the 10 Practice Groups including: 1) Youth Involvement and Leadership; 2) Education: An Essential Component of Systems of Care; 3) Connecting School Mental Health and Positive Behavior Supports; 4) Developing a Common Language; 5) School Mental Health and Child Welfare; 6) Family-School-Community Partnerships; 7) Improving School Mental Health for Youth with Disabilities; 8) Mental Health - Education Training and Workforce; 9) Connecting School Mental Health with Juvenile Justice and Dropout Prevention; 10) Quality and Evidence-Based Practice. This ensured a wide array of interesting trainings for the 800+ conference attendees involved in the various dimensions of school mental health, from research to practice, from international to local, and from veteran to newcomer. Indeed, with over 100 sessions—including intensive trainings, workshops, paper sessions, breakfast and lunch discussion meetings, poster sessions, and plenary sessions—this conference had something for everyone.

Continuing the tradition from the 11th Annual Conference, the Youth Involvement and Leadership Practice Group convened youth leaders from across the nation for a special day that included sessions and activities to promote collaboration with one another and opportunities to share their own perspectives and learn from each other about best practice and how to best impact the National Community of Practice as well as their own local community. The positive youth voice was evident throughout the conference and helped drive content and planning for the future.

The 4th Community Building Forum took place on Thursday, October 25th. The number of participants exceeded our expectations: 135 participants representing 12 states, 21 national organizations, 6 Technical Assistance and Resource Centers, and 3 federal agencies. Joanne Cashman from the IDEA Partnership at NASDSE and Mark Weist from the CSMH opened the cross-stakeholder dialogue hoping that this meeting will help us to build even stronger connections and advance our efforts in school mental health.

The main purpose of the Community Building Forum was to advance our common goals, deepen our work relationships and discover the connections that will keep us energized. In the morning we had a chance to revisit the community vision, structure, and share our learning from year three. We also heard from various Practice Groups and visited: www.sharedwork.org.

In the afternoon the Community heard from two Youth Leaders, Tammy Klinger and Scott Robertson. They did an excellent job conveying the importance of including youth in all aspects of the community and were encouraging the community to promote increased youth involvement and leadership, with significant involvement in planning the Annual Conference and the Community as a whole.

Technical Assistance States (formerly referred to as Seed Grant States) from the IDEA Partnership also convened on Saturday, October 27th for an opportunity to meet with their own team members and to share ideas and effective strategies across states to help to advance a School-Family-Community shared agenda. Twelve State teams (HI, MD, MO, NH, NC, NM, OH, PA, SC, VT, IL, and SD) focused on linking Shared Agenda work to state accountability plans, such as State Special Education Performance Plan (SPP) and other accountability plans in partner agencies. This meeting was very informative and offered numerous learning and networking opportunities and provided teams with an opportunity to strategize about next steps within their own state. Abe Wandersman and Paul Flaspohler did an outstanding presentation on how to effectively bring outcomes to the community level with their presentation on “Getting to Outcomes”

The CSMH and IDEA Partnership strive to move learning and networking beyond the Conference to occur throughout the year. One mechanism to meaningfully move beyond the “train and hope” model is to connect participants to the 10 Practice Groups and the work they will do all year round through the Shared-Work website. Thanks to the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), a Shared-Work computer lab was available all day on Friday, October 26th. All participants had the opportunity to participate in the Shared-Work registration and training lab, providing each participant a live demonstration of the site and the opportunity to join the national community. Breakfast and Luncheon meetings provided additional forums for all conference attendees to learn more about and to have a voice in the future work of each of the Practice Groups.

A highlight of the conference was the prominent and inspiring keynote speakers. Dr. Al Duchnowski and Dr. Krista Kutash both serve as Deputy Directors for the Research and Training Center for the Children's Mental Health at the University of South Florida in Tampa. They engaged the audience by defining the role of families, educators, and mental health professionals in promoting the team model they discussed in their presentation. LeDerick Horne, entrepreneur, poet, advocate, and speaker was diagnosed with severe learning disabilities as a child. He enlivened the audience with his conversational presentation style as he guided the audience through the disappointments and triumphs that ultimately led to his graduating with honors from a four-year college that boasted an exemplary support system for LD students. Dr. Dean Fixsen from the

National Implementation Research Network, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida, spoke to the audience following the luncheon on the topic of implementation science and school mental health.

The conference provided an opportunity to recognize individuals for the significant contributions in the field of school mental health. Dr. Julia Graham Lear, Director of the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools at the George Washington University received the Juanita Evans Memorial Award for Contributions in School Mental Health. Her award was accepted by Dr. Olga Acosta Princes, former Associate Director at the Center for School Mental Health and current Deputy Director of the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools. Lynn Pedraza, Director of Albuquerque Public Schools' Health and Mental Health Services received SAMHSA's Sixth Annual School Mental Health Administrator's Award. In addition, Sylvia McCree-Huntley and Christina Huntley of the CSMH received Gubernatorial Citations from Maryland Governor, Martin O'Malley in recognition of their commitment to enhancing the mental health of children and families in Baltimore and for their significant contributions to school mental health through their work on the CSMH annual conference.

With this inspirational conference fresh in our memory, we are already looking forward to an exciting conference next year in Phoenix to be held September 25-27, 2008 at the Hyatt Regency, Phoenix. The Request for Proposals for next year's conference was released in December. There has been an outstanding response to the RFP and next year's conference promises to have excellent breadth, depth, and quality of speakers. Again, thank you to all speakers, participants and practice group facilitators who made this year's conference a terrific success! To purchase audio recordings of the full conference or of particular sessions please contact National Conference Recording Services, Inc. (NCRS) at 303.807.1404 or visit their website at www.ncrsu.com.