



# Putting Mental Health at the Heart of Washington's Schools

Tina Orwall and Lisa Callan

Washington State House of Representatives

Eric J. Bruns

University of Washington SMART  
Center

Jennifer Stuber

University of Washington  
Forefront Suicide Prevention

Camille Goldy

Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

# OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGE

- Our state is facing a crisis in children's mental health
  - Nearly 100 Washington youth die by suicide every year
  - Rates of depression and suicidal behaviors have increased 35% in the past decade
  - Three in five teens experience anxiety and/or depression that interferes with school and life

# The VISION

- All children and youth in Washington State are socially and emotionally well
- Youth suicide is a thing of the past
- To help achieve this vision, our state will be a national leader in investing in comprehensive and effective mental health policies and strategies

# Schools can foster youth mental wellness



**Most youth who need mental health services do not receive them**



**SMH accounts for >70% of all MH services – and improves access for underserved youth**



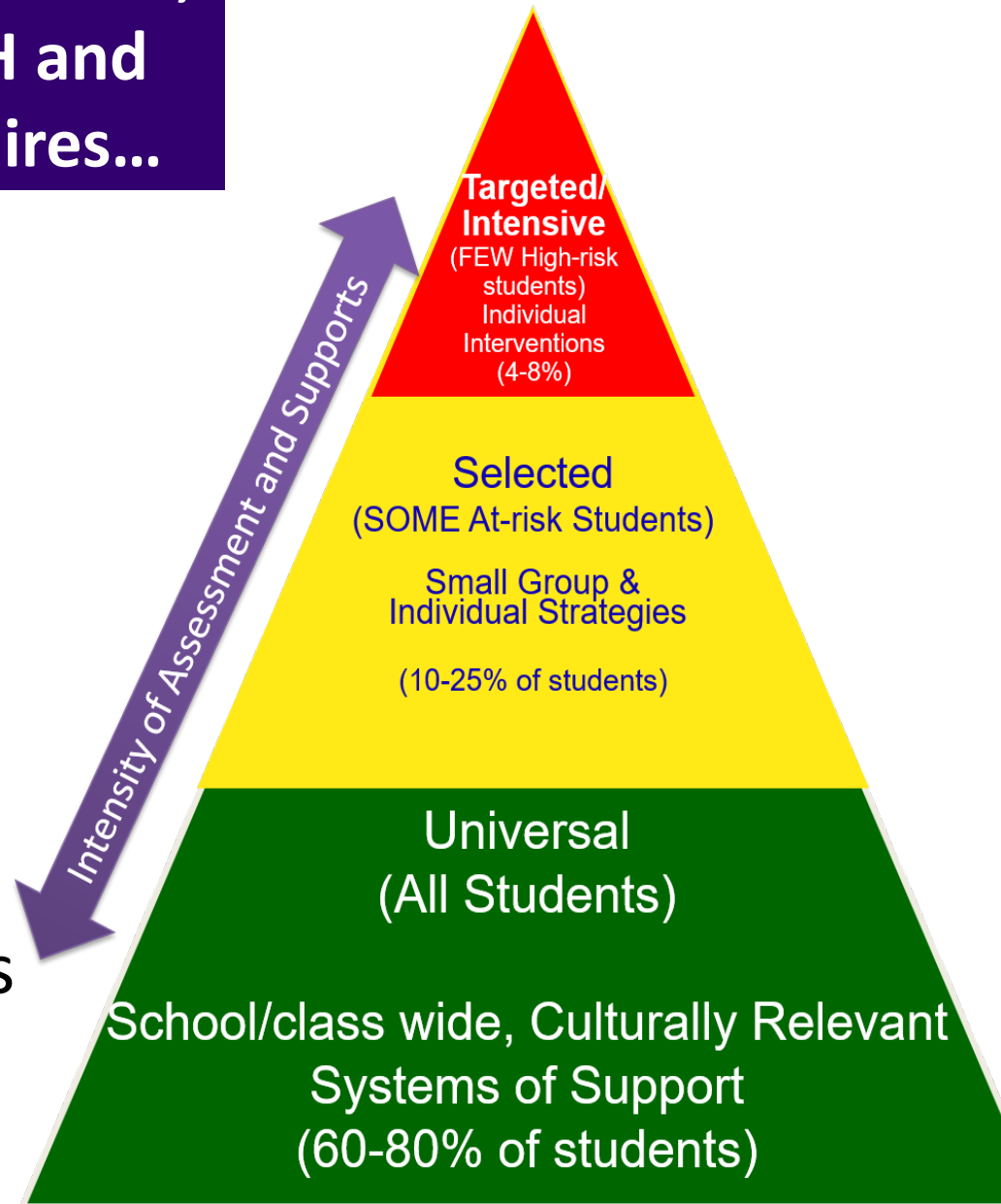
**Positive school climate can buffer youth from external risk factors**



**Social-emotional learning programs improve school achievement by 11% on average (Durlak et al., 2011)**

## The challenge: Comprehensive, well-implemented SMH and suicide prevention requires...

- An accepted quality framework to keep schools on track
- Training and TA on evidence-based practices and protocols
- Staff within schools/districts/ ESDs who can coordinate efforts



# ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN SUICIDE PREVENTION



**PREVENTION:**  
Preempt crisis

**INTERVENTION:**  
Respond to concerns and  
warning signs

**POSTVENTION:**  
Healing communication  
and supports

- Trainings in recognition and referral, mental health literacy, emotional regulation skills
- Student leadership to increase help-seeking
- Universal screening
- Targeted screening, assessment and safety planning
- Collaboration with parents/guardians
- Means-safety
- Community-based partnerships to streamline on-going mental health supports
- Student re-entry and safety plans
- Safe debriefing after suicide loss

> Accomplished when there is a well thought out district and school-level crisis response and safety plans

# PROGRESS TO DATE

- Recent legislation:
  - Studied the current level of SMH resource in districts
  - Established the need for “School MH navigators” in Educational Service Districts
  - Initiated a pilot project to bring MH consultation to schools
- Multiple grants
  - Regional School Mental Health Training & TA Center
  - Statewide School Climate Transformation grant
  - Local: Project AWARE, local climate transformation, Kaiser Permanente MTSS grants, Forefront in Schools, Best Starts for Kids Levy

# MORE PROGRESS! Proposals from the School-based Behavioral Health Subcommittee of the CMHWG

- Establish in statute the *School-based Behavioral Health & Suicide Prevention Subcommittee*
  - Outline that this will be “the venue for big broad work beyond the 2020 session recommendations”
- Establish a **WA-specific framework** for Multi-Tiered System of School MH support (**MTSS**)
- Bolster district and school supports for **suicide prevention and postvention**
- Fully fund ESD Navigators from HB 1216
  - And further specify their role



# MOVING FORWARD: A Washington School MH Agenda

## Quality Framework

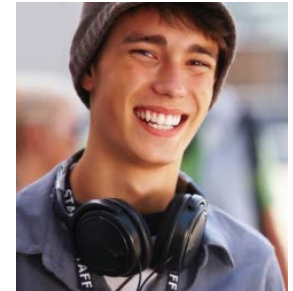
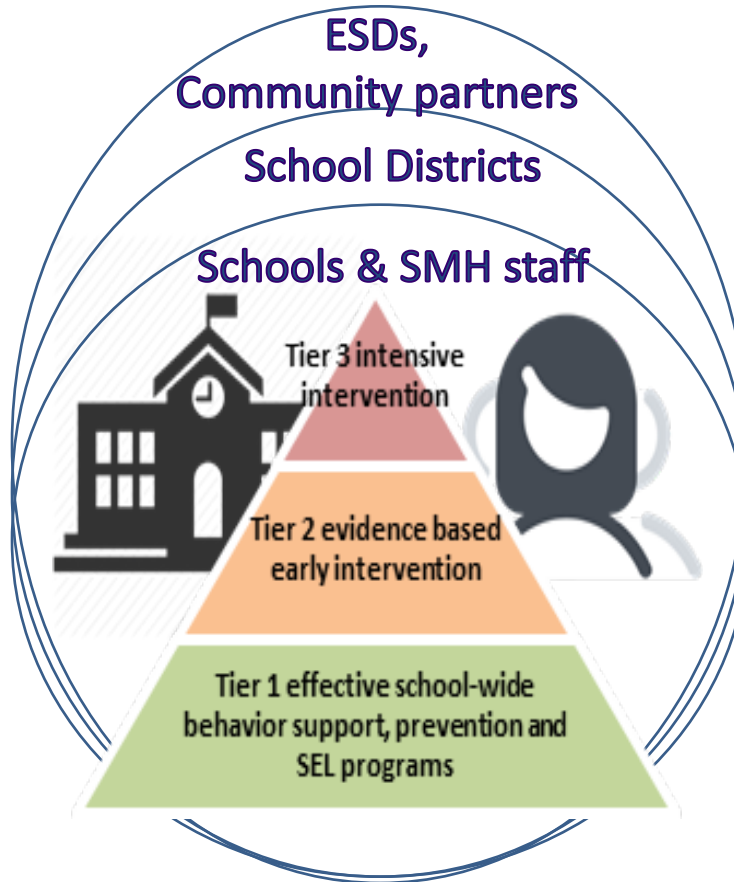
- Based on research
- For CQI, training, coaching, planning

## Resources

To support District Plans for MTSS improvement

## Training and TA

- For SMH staff
- For school/district leaders



- Young people are mentally well and ready to learn
- Schools are safe and positive places
- Students succeed academically
- Reduced rates of youth suicide and substance abuse

# TAKING ACTION

- Staffing and other needed resources for school MH and suicide prevention
- Cultivation and organization of expertise for training, consultation, TA
- Commitment to a comprehensive strategy
  - A holistic framework that supports wellness at all levels: universal, targeted, intensive

# HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

- **Agree with this platform?** Join our “Washington WISH” group so you can mobilize for school MH and suicide prevention
- **Know an education leader?** Encourage them to join as well!
- **Ideas? Concerns? Suggestions?** Another reason to join and give feedback!
- **Are you a student or young person?** Know one? We are developing a youth advisory board and advocacy group!
- **Connections to philanthropy?** Private funding could be a great route to resourcing a state training and TA network. Or other elements of the platform

