

## NJ Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S)

### Description

*The New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S) program provides mental health and prevention services to students and families across the state. It offers support through school-based hubs, delivering universal education, small group programs, and individual counseling to promote well-being, resilience, and academic success. The Mental Health Association covers Morris and Sussex Counties.*

### Personnel

NJ4S staff consists of: 1 Program Director, 1 Assistant Director, 2 Supervising Prevention Consultants, 1 Marketing Specialist, 1 Data Analysis Specialist, 4 Licensed Clinicians, 12 Prevention Consultants, 2 Scheduling Coordinators and one administrative assistant.

### Caseload

Our services are structured across three tiers to meet varying levels of need. *Tier 1* includes universal prevention information and resources that are available to all students, families, and schools—regardless of their participation in the NJ4S program. During the last fiscal year, 18,084 individuals attended Tier 1 programs. *Tier 2* consists of evidence-based prevention programs delivered in small groups, focusing on topics such as substance use, sexual health, and bullying prevention. We served 2,243 unduplicated students through these targeted programs. *Tier 3* provides brief clinical interventions, including assessments and short-term counseling, with referrals to community providers for ongoing support. Last year, 140 students received Tier 3 brief counseling services.

### Demographics

The student population included close to 500 students in each high school grade, with slightly fewer students in 8th grade, followed by 7th and then 6th grade. The majority of students identified as white (75%), followed by a significant number identifying as Hispanic (17%). The gender breakdown was nearly even between male (44%) and female (55%) students, with a smaller number identifying as transgender or nonbinary.

### Performance Outcomes

Over the past year, we delivered a total of 579 Tier 1 programs, providing universal prevention education and resources to students, families, and school communities. Additionally, 118 Tier 2 evidence-based program applications were implemented, targeting specific areas such as substance use, sexual health, and bullying prevention. For Tier 3 services, 145 students were referred for counseling services and 140

students received them. Tier 3 services offer brief clinical interventions and connecting students to appropriate ongoing support when needed. The five students who did not receive services were already participating in counseling programs that the school was unaware of at the time of the referral.

## **Program Highlights**

All schools in Sussex County were successfully signed up to access NJ4S services. In Morris County, we have 54 schools signed up to receive services. In support of the program, the DCF Commissioner visited MHA to speak with the NJ4S team and recorded a podcast with the NJ4S Director. In September 2024, NJ4S hosted Prevention Summits for both Morris and Sussex Counties, featuring a keynote presentation by Jonathon Singer, Ph.D. These summits were significant as it was another way to offer attendees the opportunity to register for the NJ4S Portal where schools request services. To increase public awareness, NJ4S ran radio and digital advertisements on local New Jersey stations, including WDHA 101.5 FM, WMTR 1250 AM, and WSUS, in partnership with iHeartMedia. These commercials aired from January through April in both 2024 and 2025. The campaign also included digital marketing through Facebook and Instagram, along with geofencing ads that ran in January 2025 targeting households in Morris and Sussex Counties. Additionally, NJ4S sponsored the Teachers Who Rock banquet and organized the Hike for Hope, a suicide awareness walk in May that drew over 120 participants.

A recent highlight in the Girls' Circle, a 10-week workshop, was a notable increase in participants' confidence and engagement during sessions. In the early stages, many participants were hesitant and reserved, but over time, their involvement became more open and expressive. By the end of the series, all participants presented more confident when sharing their thoughts and feelings, demonstrating a greater sense of comfort and self-assurance. This transformation evidenced a stronger sense of self-worth and confidence, reinforcing the program effectiveness building individual's self-esteem and sense of belonging.

## **Advocacy Activities**

NJ4S clinicians continuously engaged in advocacy efforts on behalf of their clients, focusing on academic needs and fair disciplinary practices (504 plans, IEP plans, and discussions with school counselors, school administration, and teachers). The clinicians also advocated for mental health and medical services for students, working with their parent/guardians when clinically or medically indicated. NJ4S attended the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Clothesline Project hosted by DASI, Ginnie's House, & DCP&P. This event focused on providing a visual representation of empowerment to support survivors of sexual violence, child abuse and power-based violence within our community.

## **FY 2026 Goals**

We are excited to partner with NJSIAA on a year-long program that celebrates outstanding coaches. Throughout the year, staff, parents, and students will have the opportunity to nominate their favorite coaches, with three coaches being selected and honored each athletic season. Additionally, our clinicians

and prevention team will be receiving training in eating disorder education, equipping them with tools to use during counseling sessions. To kick off the school year and foster community connection, NJ4S will also host a Color Run in September, where local organizations will be invited to share information about the valuable programs and resources, they offer throughout Sussex County.