

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, and 2 Scheduling Coordinators.

Caseload

NJ4S 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, 10,287 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. The program served 1,350 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, 178 students received Tier 3 brief counseling services.

Demographics

The student population included close to 400 students in each high school grade, with slightly fewer students in 7th grade, followed by 6th and then 8th grade. Most students identified as white (63%), followed by a significant number identifying as Hispanic (20%). The gender breakdown included male (39%) and female (59%) students, with a smaller number identifying as transgender or nonbinary.

Performance Outcomes

Over the past year, NJ4S delivered a total of 463 Tier 1 programs, providing universal prevention education and resources to students, families, and school communities. Additionally, 57 Tier 2 evidence-based program applications were implemented, targeting specific areas such as substance use, sexual health, and bullying prevention. For Tier 3 services, 194 students were referred for counseling services and 178 students received them. Tier 3 services offer brief clinical interventions and connected 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

During FY26, NJ4S continued to strengthen its regional prevention infrastructure, expand evidence-based programming, and deepen partnerships with schools and community organizations across Morris and Sussex counties. Key accomplishments included:

Expanded School Engagement and Access to Services

NJ4S Morris/Sussex achieved strong regional engagement, with 92% of the 87 eligible schools signing up to access NJ4S services. This level of participation reflects continued relationship-building with school communities and increased awareness of NJ4S as a resource for prevention, mental health promotion, and student support.

Development of a Tier 2 Evidence-Based Program Catalogue

The team developed a comprehensive Tier 2 catalogue of evidence-based programs to support schools in identifying programming that aligns with their students' needs. The catalogue provides school personnel with clear information about available curricula, target populations, program structure, and intended outcomes. It has become an instrumental component of the initial consultation process, allowing NJ4S staff and school partners to make more informed and intentional program selections based on identified school and student needs.

LGBTQ+ Staff Training and Capacity Building

NJ4S partnered with a consultant to support the leadership team in developing an LGBTQ+ Training Plan for staff. The resulting professional development opportunities strengthened staff knowledge and capacity to provide culturally responsive, affirming, and supportive services to LGBTQ+ students and their families.

Preparation for Expanded Eating Disorder Prevention and Support

In anticipation of New Jersey Assembly Bill A4984 and the potential expansion of eating disorder awareness and prevention within the scope of NJ4S services, two licensed NJ4S clinicians enrolled in and completed Rutgers University's Eating Disorders Clinical Certificate Program. This proactive investment in staff expertise positions the program to respond effectively to emerging statewide priorities and provide informed support related to eating disorder prevention and early identification.

Expansion of Evidence-Based Prevention Programming

As part of an ongoing staff prevention training initiative, the prevention team was trained in the Teen Connections Project (TCP) during Summer 2025. TCP offers a condensed, 12-week adaptation of the yearlong Teen Outreach Program (TOP), increasing the team's ability to provide positive youth development and prevention programming within schools that may not have the capacity to commit to a full-year intervention.

Yearlong Teen Outreach Program (TOP) Implementation

NJ4S successfully implemented Teen Outreach Program (TOP) groups in two schools throughout the entire academic year. The yearlong format provided students with consistent opportunities to develop social-emotional skills, strengthen relationships, engage with their communities, and build protective factors through evidence-based positive youth development programming.

Positive Safe Dates Outcomes

The Safe Dates teen dating violence prevention program was successfully implemented at Kittatinny Regional High School and Sparta High School. Across participating classes, outcome data demonstrated a reduction in risk related to teen dating violence, highlighting the impact of comprehensive, evidence-based prevention education focused on healthy relationships, communication, and violence prevention.

Mental Health Training for Youth-Serving Professionals

NJ4S expanded its community prevention efforts by providing mental health education and training to adults who regularly interact with youth. Mental health training was provided to Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey camp staff, while Youth Mental Health First Aid was delivered to Vernon PAL camp and before/after-care staff. These efforts strengthened the capacity of community partners to recognize signs of mental health and substance use challenges, respond appropriately, and connect youth with additional support when needed.

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.

FY 2027 Goals

- **Expand Tier 2 Programming:** Continue to expand the breadth and reach of Tier 2 prevention programming available to schools, with an emphasis on identifying evidence-based and evidence-informed programs that address emerging and commonly identified student needs. This will provide schools with a broader range of targeted prevention options and strengthen NJ4S's ability to match programming to identified needs.
- **Strengthen Community Provider Partnerships:** Build upon existing partnerships with community-based providers, including the DAWN Center for Independent Living, TAARA, and other organizations with specialized expertise. These partnerships will help enhance programming, increase access to specialized resources and training, and strengthen NJ4S's ability to respond to the diverse needs of students, families, and school communities.
- **Leverage Strong School Partnerships to Expand Engagement:** Continue strengthening relationships with schools that have demonstrated high levels of engagement with NJ4S services. Utilize these established partnerships, successful outcomes, and school experiences as a springboard for outreach to schools that have had limited or no prior engagement with NJ4S, including opportunities for existing school partners to serve as program champions and share their experiences with other districts.
- **Increase Overall School Engagement and Program Reach:** Use a more targeted outreach and consultation approach to increase awareness and utilization of NJ4S services among less-engaged schools. By combining stronger prevention-planning tools, established community partnerships, and the experiences of highly engaged schools, NJ4S will work toward increasing equitable access to prevention programming throughout Morris and Sussex counties.