

## *Spotlight on Success* **Rhode Island Department of Education**

*Through the National Initiative to Advance Health in K-12 Education by Preventing Chronic Disease and Promoting Healthy Behaviors Project, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors is proud to share the state-level school health successes of our members and partners.*



### **Coordinating State and District Action for Student Wellness**

Believing that student success is rooted in strong systems of support, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is working to create conditions for sustainable student well-being across the state. With a focus on mental health access, integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and health and education alignment, RIDE is building capacity within and beyond the school building to support the whole child.

RIDE has refined its approach to technical assistance, cross-agency partnerships, and infrastructure to support district implementation. The team identified three key drivers for their work: building cross-disciplinary teams, early identification and support systems, and infrastructure and policy to scale effective practices.

- RIDE is working to develop a shared language and provide role clarity across school mental health professionals, including school nurses, counselors, social workers, and administrators. The state is helping districts identify gaps in teaming and develop strategies for collaboration by using tools like the School Mental Health Quality Assessment (SMHQA).
- The department is supporting the integration of universal screeners, risk assessment tools, and streamlined referral processes into district MTSS structures.
- RIDE is connecting its work to broader state-level mental health initiatives and providing districts with access to vetted tools (e.g., Branching Minds), planning templates, and guidance aligned with field recommendations and best practices for school mental health staffing and collaboration.



These state strategies are informing the work in Providence Public School District (PPSD), where school mental health systems are being strengthened.

- PPCSD used SMHQA results to identify fragmentation in support teams. In response, they created a multi-disciplinary leadership team to clarify roles, improve referral systems, and align Tier 2/3 practices across schools.
- PPCSD implemented Branching Minds to consolidate student support data, so teams can track progress, assess fidelity, and adjust interventions in real time.
- PPCSD is expanding access to small group supports and intervention strategies that meet the needs of their student population, and quarterly professional development is now focused on evidence-based practices and team collaboration.
- RIDE's push to elevate the role of school nurses is mirrored at the district level, where PPCSD is looking at how nurses can support early identification and sit on MTSS teams.
- The district is using fidelity tools and climate surveys to measure progress and aims to move their SMHQA score from "Emerging" to "Proficient".

RIDE and PPCSD show how state strategy and district implementation can support each other. With aligned goals, shared tools, and consistent communication, they are building a more connected student-centered system that prioritizes well-being and readiness to learn.

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