

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Change to Chill School Partnership (CTCSP) is an initiative that partners with schools in Allina Health's service area to promote teen mental well-being and resiliency using Change to Chill (CTC) material. During the 2019–2020 academic year, CTCSP provided 16 high schools with trainings for staff, tailored communications for parent engagement, funding for a "Chill Zone" and a summer internship opportunity for two students.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The main objective of this evaluation was to assess CTCSP through outcome and process measures that aligned with program goals. Specifically, does CTCSP (1) increase students' knowledge of stress management tools, (2) increase students' confidence in their ability to identify and manage stress, (3) contribute to a school environment that is more supportive of teen mental well-being and (4) increase the capacity of faculty, staff and parents/guardians to support teen mental health resiliency? Data were collected via pre/post student surveys, a student focus group and a parent/guardian survey. Pre/post survey analyses only compared Ellsworth and Sleepy Eye high schools due to limited post-survey responses caused by COVID-19 school closures.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Pre/post survey: Pre-survey respondents included 2,812 students from all partnership schools. All grade levels were represented. Most pre-survey participants were female (53 percent) or male (40 percent). Seven percent identified as non-binary, transgender or unsure of their gender. Respondents were diverse in race/ethnicity: 62 percent white, 8.7 percent Hispanic/Latino, 6.6 percent Asian, 6.1 percent African, 5.6 percent Black and 3.5 Native American. Due to COVID-19 school closures, only 91 students responded to the post-survey. These students were from Ellsworth and Sleepy Eye high schools. Though less diverse, post-survey demographics were still somewhat comparable to the overall pre-survey population trends.

Focus group: Seven students across all grade levels participated in the focus group at Hastings High School. Participants were mentors in the school's Peer Helper program and used CTC tools regularly.

Parent/guardian survey: There were 59 parent/guardian respondents from six CTCSP high schools, including Blaine, Burnsville, Fridley, Monticello, Sleepy Eye and St. Louis Park. Burnsville (n=27) and St. Louis Park (n=15) had the highest response rates.

KEY FINDINGS

- CTCSP schools experienced significant improvements in student mental well-being. Students' confidence in their ability to cope with stress significantly increased over the school year.
- The Chill Zone may help students' confidence in their coping skills, as well as contribute to a more supportive school environment. Students who used the Chill Zone were significantly more likely to feel confident about getting emotional support from school staff.
- The majority of parents/guardians felt CTC was helpful in supporting their teen's mental well-being.
- CTCSP is successful on an individual level but could better support schools' overall mental health environment. Students' perceptions of school supportiveness of mental health decreased over the year.
- A major theme of this evaluation was the request to integrate CTC more widely and deeply in schools.

RESULTS

Student Survey

- **Familiarity:** The majority of respondents had heard of CTC (58 percent) and the Chill Zone (77 percent).
- **Pre vs post:** Between the pre- and post-survey, there was *significant improvement* on students' overall confidence in using stress management skills when they participated in CTC programming. However, post-survey students reported *lower mental health support* from home and school.
- **Chill Zone:** Students who spent time in their school's Chill Zone reported *higher confidence* in their ability to cope with stress than students who did not visit the Chill Zone. Additionally, respondents who visited the Chill Zone felt their home and school environments were *more supportive* of mental health.
- **Peer support:** Students who participated in a peer support program that used CTC materials had *higher confidence* in their ability to manage stress than students who did not participate. Furthermore, these same students found their home and school environments to be *more supportive* of mental well-being.

Student Focus Group

- **Chill Zone:** Students felt the Chill Zone had been the most helpful and successful component of CTCSP. According to the Hastings High School guidance counselor, *more students have used Peer Helpers as a resource this year* because the Chill Zone provided a comfortable and private space to talk.
- **Personal impact:** Focus group participants felt their relationships with friends have improved due to CTCSP. They also talked about mental health with their families more often. One student said, "*Change to Chill helped me tell my parents what they can do to help me. I'm learning what is helpful for me and that it's okay to tell people what you need.*"
- **School impact:** Participants claimed CTCSP has helped *normalize dialogue* around mental health at school. They felt staff were *more supportive* of mental well-being.
- **Suggestions for improvement:** Students would like to see CTC skills incorporated more widely and consistently across the school. They also requested Allina Health support teacher engagement with CTC and ensure CTC materials are applicable to all students across difference.

Parent/Guardian Survey

- **Helpfulness:** The majority of parent/guardian respondents felt CTC material was *at least somewhat helpful* in: learning about new teen mental health resources (59 percent), talking to their student about mental health tools (62 percent) and supporting their teen through stressful situations (62 percent). About 20 percent of parents/guardians said CTC material was *very helpful* in each of these areas.
- **Application:** Almost half of respondents (47 percent) said their student tried a CTC skill at least once.
- **Suggestions for improvement:** Several respondents requested a parent/guardian-specific seminar on CTCSP. Other common themes included creating more action-oriented material for parents/guardians, sending communication more often and integrating CTC skills into classrooms more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen current school partnerships by adding depth to CTC materials.
2. Improve program support of school's mental health environment, such as offering additional training for teachers on using CTC skills in the classroom.
3. Increase support for parents/guardians at partnership schools.
4. Ensure CTC is accessible for diverse audiences. Through consultation, revise material as needed for differences across age, mental and physical ability, race and ethnicity, culture and language.
5. Continue monitoring future schools' pre- and post-intervention outcome measures. Consistency will allow future evaluation results to be compared with past evaluation results.
6. Evaluate second- and third-year partnership schools in order to monitor the long-term impacts of CTCSP on outcome measures and program sustainability.