Providing a Pandemic Safety Net:

2020-2021 Annual Report

Student Support & Health Services Department,
Sacramento City Unified School District

Sacramento City Unified School District
Student Support & Health Services

Sacramento City Unified School District

Contents

Department Vision 2
From the Director 3
Executive Summary 4
Part One: Services to Students 5
Shifting Services for Pandemic Response and Distance Learning Support 6
Tier 1 Services: Universal Supports for a Strong Foundation 7
Tier 2 and 3 Services: Targeted and Intensive Interventions 12
Support in the Palms of their Hands: *Grace* App Launch 15
Part Two: Training & Professional Development 16
Training the SCUSD Community 16
Internship Program 16
Department Focus: Healing Centered Engagement & Antiracist Practice 17
Part Three: Awards and Honors 18
Part Four: Staffing & Budget 19
Staffing 19
Budget 20
Part Five: Looking Ahead 22
Expanding Services in a Time of Need 22
Diving Deeper into Evaluation: Including Evidence-based Indicators in EIIS and Practice 24
Ushering in the use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support 25
SCUSD Board and Staff 26
References 0

Our vision is to serve all students with compassion and care, ensuring families have equitable access to systems of support that promote hope, resilience, empowerment, physical & mental wellness, and educational success.
Sacramento City Unified School District
Sacramento City Unified School District
Student Support & Health Services Department

From the Director

Dear SCUSD Community,

As we pause to reflect on this year, we are overwhelmed by how much has happened, what we experienced and endured, how we coped, grieved, cried, loved and connected. The science of stress tells us the kaleidoscope of this year will live in our bodies for years to come - and we wonder how our bodies keep the score with our pandemic experiences, as COVID-19 continues to twist and turn through new mutations both biological and societal. This year was such a blur that many of us have difficulty recalling all that has happened - the many lows, some highs, and a host of new experiences we navigated. We continued to move forward, pivoting through all the change this year brought as we mastered new technology, new ways to outreach, assess and support - all while supporting the wellness of ourselves and our social systems.

We also hold fast to the deep sense of gratitude we feel for those who pushed through the myriad emotions and experiences of COVID-19 to step up and care for others: healthcare workers, grocery store employees, sanitation and janitorial staff, teachers, school nurses and social workers, parents and caregivers. We sit with thankfulness in our hearts for the ways in which we were each able to care for ourselves and others through such difficult, uncharted territory, and we acknowledge now more than ever our interconnectedness, if for no other reason than this shared experience.

One of my personal favorite reflections on this past year was capturing the thoughts and feelings of students across our District in the "*Pandemiversary: SCUSD Honors One Year of Distance Learning"* video that our staff pulled together and shared in their school communities. The joy in students' smiles, the courageous vulnerability they showed in detailing their experience – they served as a touching reminder of why we do this work, and how much brighter our futures are due to their presence. If you missed the video (or, like me, would enjoy re-watching it), just visit https://tinyurl.com/scusdpandemiversary.

Reflection, acceptance, and gratitude are keys to healing, and these processes may take us weeks, months, or even years. As we begin - and continue - to heal, our collective hope is that we make caring for ourselves a priority, so that we may care for all those in our community that we serve and support. As we look to the 2021-22 school year we may still be serving with pandemic-era precautions such as face coverings and hand sanitizing, but we also show up with the same sense of service, the love and care in our eyes and voices with every gesture of support. Whether it's a vaccination, COVID-19 test, a moment of mental or emotional respite, or a linkage to resources for the well-being of our students and families - we continue to serve with compassion and care.

May you be safe and well –

Victoria Flores, MSW, PPSC
Director III, Student Support & Health Services

Executive Summary

How does one wrap up the most unconventional year in our collective lifetimes? There are so many inspiring stories of courage, grace, grit, and hope that we have had the privilege of bearing witness to over the last twelve months that we could write a very big book! What may be most heartening, however, is a birds-eye view of what we achieved together as a Department, a unified force of compassion, care, and support for our students, families, and school communities.

Academic & Attendance Support

- **61% increase** in family support outreach;
- Average of **14,724** texts and **32,331** minutes per month using district-issued cell phones;
- Total of **32,905** individual outreach contacts.

Basic Needs & Resources

- **91% increase** in Universal (Tier 1) basic needs supports, such as food distributions;
- **71% increase** in Targeted and Intensive (Tier 2/3) basic needs supports;
- **263% increase** in supports for students and families experiencing homelessness

While early intervention (Tier 2) & intensive (Tier 3) services were provided at similar rates to last year, Prevention (Tier 1) services **increased by 124%**.

Supported and supervised **84** college-level interns - who collectively provided **33,000 hours** of service to our district families - equivalent to 22 FTE.

Sacramento City Unified School District
Student Support & Health Services

2020-2021

Health & COVID-19 Response

- **31,942** students, families and community members tested and/or vaccinated to help stop the spread of COVID-19;
- When an individual tested positive for COVID-19 or was exposed - we provided support and contact tracing for approximately **1,500** district staff and families.

Mental Health & Wellness

- **414% increase** in classroom interventions, such as COVID-19 information, mindfulness and coping skills;
- **Launched** the *Grace* app (Giving Resources and Care Every Day) created by students for students - providing ready access to support and trusted resources.

Part One: Services to Students

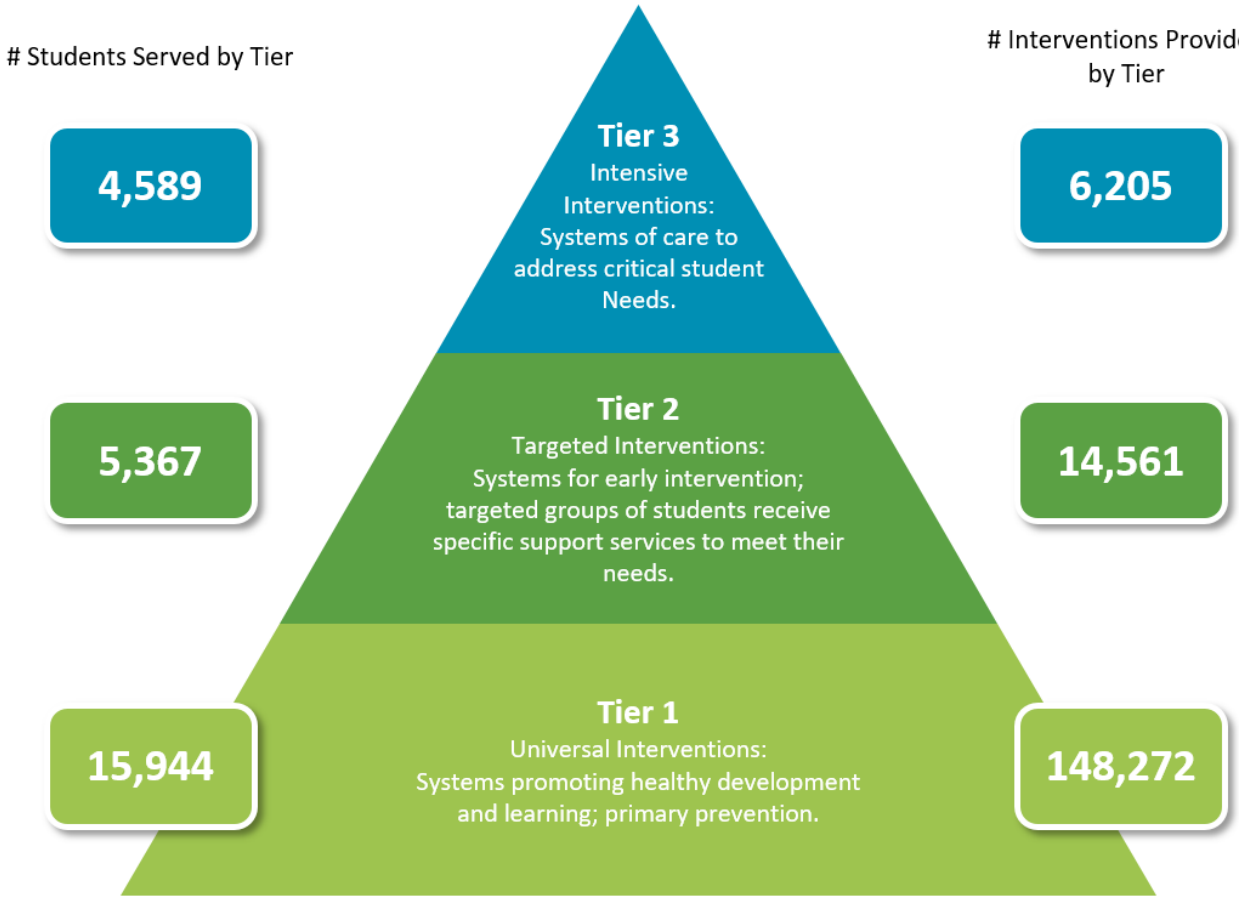
For our students to be successful academically, they must be healthy and ready to learn. When students are in need of support – whether academic, behavioral, emotional or social – our intentional response is critical. This report reflects services provided by the SCUSD Student Support & Health Services Department, made up of:

- The Connect Center, and 29 site-based Student Support Centers (SSCs);
- Health Services;
- Homeless Services;
- Foster Youth Services; and
- Tobacco Use Prevention Education (TUPE).

Together these programs are staffed by 85 caring, highly-trained professionals who work collaboratively to engage and assist vulnerable students and families, and support our schools and community. During the 2020-21 academic year, these professionals have provided over 160,000 interventions to nearly 16,000 students and their families, all with **compassion**, **care**, **equity** and **empowerment**.

Total Unduplicated Number of Students Served: **15,631***

Total Number of Services Provided: **166,936**



Unduplicated number of students served does **not include students served by Health Services programs, due to confidentiality and differences in data tracking systems.*

Shifting Services for Pandemic Response and Distance Learning Support

As trained experts in relationship-building and service-delivery, SSHS staff were characteristically responsive to the needs of our students and families as they shifted significantly with the COVID-19 pandemic and Distance Learning (DL). In addition to quickly adapting to provide services safely and ethically in remote and technologically-reliant formats, we were ready to meet our students, families, and school communities where they were.

This conscious acknowledgement of the rapidly changing needs of our students and school communities allowed our Student Support, Homeless, and Foster Youth Services staff to maintain the number of students served by over the same period of time last academic year, despite myriad barriers to accessing students and families, and a decrease in school-based referrals due to DL.

By using a proactive outreach strategy, within the first few months of the school year we had **increased our pandemic-era outreach by 61%**, as compared to the last quarter of last academic year. While early intervention (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) services were provided at similar rates to last year, staff **increased prevention (Tier 1) services by more than 124%**, including activities such as:

Outreach calls, texts and messages regarding Distance Learning, Return to School, and Summer School (**32,905 contacts**);

Classroom interventions in mental health and wellness, mindfulness, coping and social skills, and education around COVID-19 basics, hygiene, and wellness (a **414% increase** over last academic year).

Food & basic needs distribution events (an **85% increase** over last academic year); and

The COVID-19 Pandemic afforded an opportunity to deepen connections with the larger communities that our students and families call home. We served **31,942 students, staff, and community members** with **free COVID testing and vaccines**.

Over this past year, with care and compassion for all, SSHS staff leveraged existing partnerships and utilized community building skills to develop new ones; forged meaningful relationships with some of our District's most vulnerable families; and worked tirelessly to support students who struggled with technology in DL, pandemic-related anxiety, depression, and stress, and even those who were deemed "disengaged" or "unreachable." These services were offered from a wholly **strengths-based** perspective where students and their families were approached with **cultural humility** and a deep respect for **individual agency**. It was a privilege to do this work during such a challenging time for us all.

Tier 1 Services: Universal Supports for a Strong Foundation

As mentioned earlier, our pivot to address emerging pandemic-related needs led to a 124% increase in Universal (Tier 1) services.

With the ritual of back-to-school excitement replaced by the unfamiliar – and for some inaccessible – move to Distance Learning (DL), the need for robust outreach and mobilization of existing relationships was clear. SSHS staff, along with their school site colleagues, took to the phones in an attempt to reach students and families who were among the large number of students who were not engaged or participating within the first weeks of school.

In addition to phone calls, SSHS staff were granted an additional, critical tool: cell phones! In April 2020, using CARES Act funds, all SSHS staff were issued a District cell phone, which allowed staff to connect with families in the way that many parents and caregivers increasingly prefer: via text message. During this academic year alone, staff **sent an average of 14,724 text messages per month**, messages that were often the first communication that any school employee was able to have with a parent or caregiver! Staff's experience was consistent with a 2016 Harvard study, which found that text messaging increased parent/caregiver engagement (Hurwitz, Lauricella, Hanson, Raden, & Wartella, 2015). Similar studies from Columbia (Bergman & Chan, 2017) and Stanford (York & Loeb, 2014) showed the positive – dramatically so in some cases – effects of using text messaging technology to facilitate school/family communication, and the use of that technology as an equity tool for those parents and caregivers without access to computers or email addresses, or who had less technological literacy.

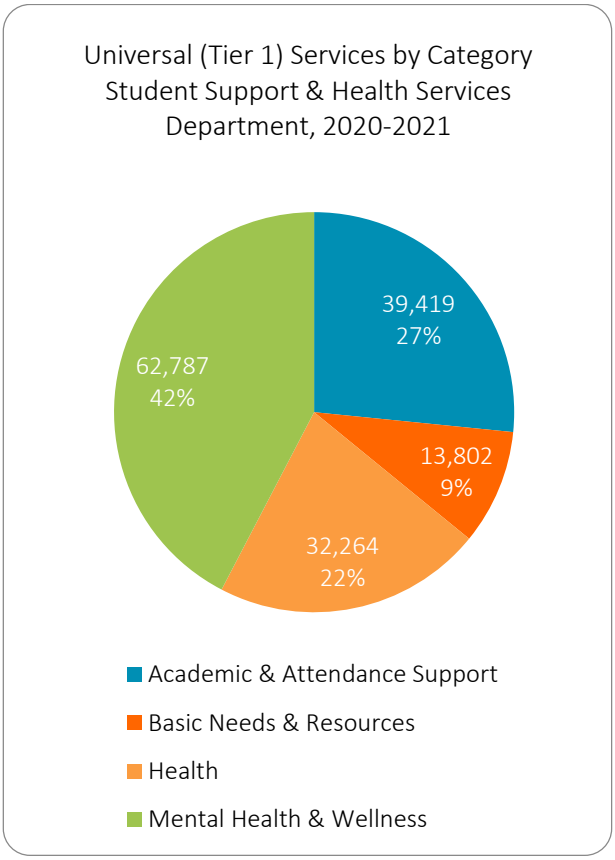
For SSHS staff, the benefits of having access to a District cell phone were abundant. With this resource, staff averaged 32,331 minutes of calls and 14,724 text messages monthly, and were thus able to:

- Engage with parents/caregivers who had reduced access to phone calls during traditional office hours (7am-5pm) due to job or caregiving responsibilities;
- Engage with parents/caregivers who felt more comfortable communicating non-verbally with support staff, and would respond more frequently to text messages than to phone calls or voicemail messages;
- Quickly get parents and caregivers visual information and important web links to critical resources despite their lack of access to email or computer (increasing equity in families' access to school and community resources);
- Assure parents and caregivers of confidentiality, given that they were communicating via a District-issued and owned device, rather than a staff's personal device;
- Afforded staff a new, more immediate way to initiate contact with families with a home language other than English, in the absence of translators. Staff often used Google Translate or similar apps to send brief messages to parents and caregivers in an effort to establish a connection when they worked remotely and did not have access to bilingual school staff or other translators.

Tier 1 outreach around distance learning engagement and participation, return to school, summer school opportunities, and various pandemic-related resources such as the City's and County's financial assistance program, "SERA," resulted in **over 30,000 family contacts** using phone, text, apps, and social media outlets.

By the Numbers: Universal (Tier 1) Services

Academic & Attendance Support	
Attendance Committee	196
Attendance Event	508
COST/MDT	1,386
Distance Learning Distribution/Outreach	30,908
Return to School & Summer School Outreach	1,997
School-wide Events	4,424
Basic Needs & Resources	
Coffee Chat/Caregiver Engagement	167
Distribution of Food/Basic Needs	12,719
Distribution of School Supplies, Uniforms	408
Foster Family Night Event	219
Interpretation/Translation	289
Health	
COVID-19 Surveillance Testing*	9,263
COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics*	21,679
Dental Screening	618
Flu Vaccine Clinics	500
Immunizations	204
Mental Health & Wellness	
Character Education/SEL Activity	19,734
Classroom Intervention	36,431
Drop-in Group	3,512
School Climate	1,008



** These services were extended beyond students and families, to SCUSD staff and community members, as part of the District's COVID-19 response.*

Feature: "Return to Health" Plan

SSHS' Director and Health Services division staff authored and supported the implementation of all public health mitigation measures implemented in SCUSD through the Return to Health plan. As research taught us more about COVID-19 and public health mitigation measures updates, the plan went through several updates as well.

Continued training and briefings were provided to site leaders to support their safe reopening of Learning Hubs and eventually in-person learning through the district. At over 80 pages long, the plan outlined a host of scenarios, guidance, and appendices to support the health and safety of our entire SCUSD community. The plan was available on the district website with easy to understand infographics to keep our community informed.

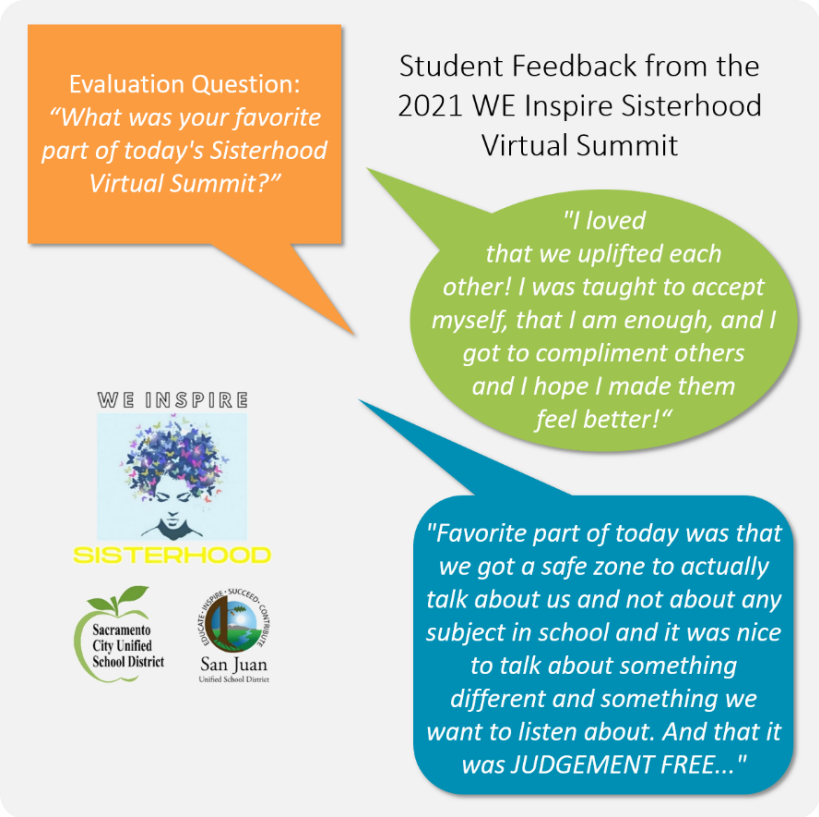
Feature: "WE Inspire" Sisterhood Virtual Summit

Foster Youth Services held its first ever virtual summit: WE Inspire Sisterhood on May 5th, 2021. This summit was a joint effort with the San Juan USD Family and Community Engagement Office leadership team. By collaborating to design and implement a joint-district event, we were able to create an opportunity for students from across the Sacramento region to connect, build, and grow together in a virtual learning and healing experience.

Photo 1: Screenshot of a few of the 190 WE Inspired Virtual Summit participants.

Nearly 150 students, grades 6th – 10th pre-registered, representing 54 different schools across both districts. Prior to the Summit all registered students received a gift "swag bag," including customized t-shirts, water bottles, lanyards, masks, a health and wellness kit, and tobacco prevention information. 121 students and 69 supporting adults, including district staff, workshop presenters, and parents joined the online event, for a total of 190 participants. **83% of student participants represented SCUSD**.

In response to student expressed needs and interests, WE Inspire offered opportunities for unity, learning, and fun! Workshop topics – informed by student focus groups – focused on self-love, personal narratives, and overall wellness. A live DJ and Summit MC led virtual games, dancing and raffle prizes to offer students fun opportunities to meaningfully engage and feel connected with others in the digital space.



Closure of the summit was carefully planned to create space for students to reflect on their experiences and hear words of affirmation and encouragement from district leaders. Students also used the chat box function and unmute option to share their reflections and offer appreciation and encouragement to one another. Quantitative reflection and feedback were also collected via an online satisfaction survey following the event, in which **91% of participants expressed satisfaction** with the summit.

Feature: Suicide Prevention from a Distance

Mental illness in young people across the United States is increasing, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Suicide behaviors and feelings of sadness and hopelessness have steadily increased among young people in the five years immediately preceding the onset of COVID-19 (Austin, Hanson, Zhang, & Zheng, 2020). And, while it is still early for comprehensive data on the impact of the pandemic on youth mental health in the United States, a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control found that **among adolescents aged 12–17 years there was a 31% increase in the proportion of mental health–related emergency department (ED) visits and 39% increase in the average weekly number of ED visits for suspected suicide attempt** from summer 2020 to winter 2021 than during the corresponding period in 2019-2020 (Yard, et al., 2021).

Led by the Student Support and Health Services (SSHS) department, SCUSD has adopted policies, procedures and practices to prevent and intervene early in student mental health crises including the crisis of suicide. In addition to direct education and intervention with students and their families, SSHS staff is responsible for overseeing and coordinating SCUSD's **Comprehensive Student Suicide Prevention training program** including training district staff to:

Photo 2: Screenshot of a scene from the Kognito training module.

- Recognize the signs of emotional distress,
- Recognize risk factors for suicide, and
- Facilitate the connection of students in need to support services and treatment.

Thanks to continued grant funding from Kaiser Permanente and SAMHSA, SSHS was able to continue to utilize the Kognito online simulations program to provide these valuable trainings. SCUSD staff were able to access a variety of Kognito simulations including the *At-Risk* modules and *K-12 Trauma Informed Practices* modules. During the 2020-21 school year, **SCUSD staff completed 1,965 Kognito video training simulations**.

In addition to all-staff Tier 1 education in suicide prevention, SSHS provides the **training and technical assistance for the 173 staff who provide Tier 3 suicide risk assessment to students in crisis** throughout the District. These staff include school counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers and specialists with mental health credentials.

SCUSD employees were not the only recipients of suicide prevention education in 2020-21. As distance learning continued into this school year, SSHS staff increased their focus on prevention and outreach efforts directly to students, by increasing classroom-based education and universal-level (Tier 1) drop-in groups as safe spaces for students to connect with trusted, trained adults. What's more, SCUSD enabled safety filters on District-issued equipment and accounts, in a continuing effort to ensure the safety of students struggling with mental health challenges. These efforts resulted in:

- **Over 16,000 middle and high School students received Suicide Prevention training** provided in partnership with SSHS staff and Academic School Counselors using the evidence-based Signs of Suicide curriculum or Kognito simulation training.
- **38,533 preventative contacts through classroom interventions** such as mindfulness, emotional awareness and coping skills, and more;
- **235 Lightspeed Internet Safety alerts, responded to with safety assessments** by SSHS staff and staff in other departments and school sites; and
- **293 suicide risk assessments** by SSHS staff alone.

Feature: COVID-19 Surveillance Testing and Vaccines

In February 2021, our Health Services division began offering free, weekly COVID-19 testing to staff, students, and community partners. Through a partnership with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), both PCR (polymerase chain reaction) and Rapid Antigen Tests are now available and testing has been expanded to include volunteers, family members, and close contacts. CDPH provided testing kits, test registration software, test processing, and technical assistance, while Health Services employees and volunteers staffed the testing events. Provided for individuals experiencing symptoms, those that have been exposed to COVID-19, and on a routine basis (also called surveillance testing), we **administered 11,985 tests** between February and June 2021. COVID testing continues throughout July, in the many summer programs offered by SCUSD.

Photo 3: School Nurse Renee Wurschmidt-Owens (left) walks SCUSD staff through self-administration of a COVID-19 test.

Health Services also began hosting its COVID-19 vaccination clinics in February 2021, through partnerships with

- Dignity Health,
- Equivax,
- Dr. Carter/Del Paso Heights Vaccine Clinic,
- SCPH Mobile Clinic,
- UC Davis Health,
- Kaiser Permanente, and
- Sutter Health.

Photo 4: School Nurse Melissa Linck (right) administers a COVID-19 Vaccine to Central Kitchen staff.

SCUSD school nurses and community volunteers staffed clinics, which were held at the Serna Center and various school sites. Serving as vaccine administrators, charters, registrars, line monitors, parking attendants, and more, together these individuals devoted hundreds of hours to helping eligible students, staff, family and community members access this important vaccine. In fact, as of June 30, a total of **21,679 vaccines** were administered in our clinics, which will continue throughout the summer and fall.

Feature: Health Aide Program

Upon return to on-site learning a Health Aide (HA) was provided at every school site to support COVID-19 mitigation requirements. **103 health aides were on boarded**, given training on PCR and antigen testing, COVID-19 symptom assessment, sick/symptomatic student management and all Return to Health requirements. The HAs primary role was to promote and provide COVID-19 testing through partnership with CDPH testing programs. This included surveillance testing available to all students and staff with the recommendation to test every two weeks. They also provided response testing for students and staff that developed symptoms at school to identify cases of COVID and to enable a quicker return to school if testing negative. The health aides also staffed the Serna Center Testing clinic that offers testing to symptomatic and exposed individuals.

The availability of easy on-site testing reassured staff and families with mostly negative results and identified cases of COVID-19 that were investigated and provided contact tracing to minimize exposure to students and staff on sites. The HAs also staffed the Care Room at sites to provide isolation care of students with COVID symptoms. They worked with staff during before school screening and throughout the day to monitor for possible COVID-19 symptoms

or exposure, and to reinforce the Stay at Home and Return to School requirements. In addition to their Tier 1 work, **22 health aides were trained in contact tracing** and several provided contact tracing case investigation.

Tier 2 and 3 Services: Targeted and Intensive Interventions

Despite the enormous increase in Tier 1 services provided, myriad barriers to accessing students and families, and a decrease in school-based referrals due to DL, the number of more individualized services did not decrease. We did, however, see a shift in the kinds of Targeted and Intensive interventions that students and families were requesting and open to receiving.

The changes in service that we saw are representative of the immediate economic impacts of the pandemic to our community, including job loss and insufficient affordable housing. With 70% of SCUSD families experiencing poverty (California Department of Education, 2021), the pandemic economic downturn only exacerbated existing stressors. Families were focused most acutely on surviving the pandemic with basic needs intact, as evidenced by the **71% increase in Basic Needs services** – linking families with food, clothing, shelter, transportation, utility, employment, and financial resources – than in years passed.

Photo 5: Volunteers from the 95820 Food Project - a collaborative developed to address pandemic food insecurity by Oak Ridge Student Support Center Coordinator Ashley Clark - gather together to prepare a distribution to families.

Referrals to homeless programs were up 263% this academic year, which not only meant that students and their families were struggling with housing instability, but that the stress of that instability was likely causing additional stressors as well. In fact, **crisis-level interventions were up 62%** on average. Of these services, most notable was the increase of referrals to **family violence resources, up more than 250%**.

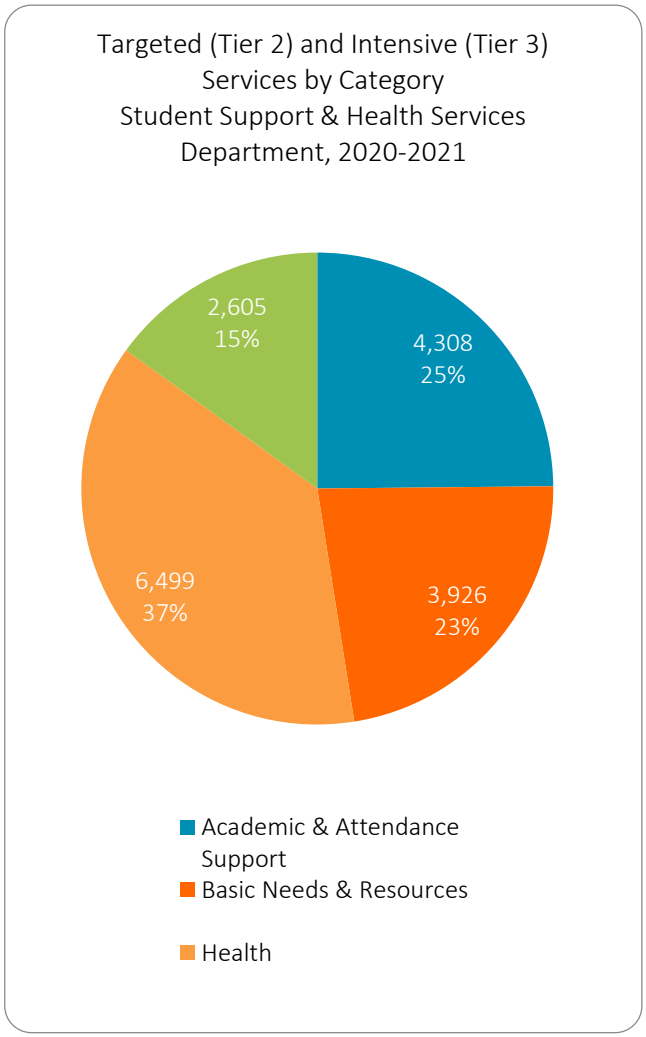
Scarcity of basic needs and crises, combined with numerous technology challenges, seemed to hamper attendance and engagement in distance learning (DL). Parents and caregivers reported many obstacles, including lack of access to technology or poor quality technology; lack of or poor technological literacy (and therefore difficulty in supporting the student in DL); student attention and focus issues; student refusal to participate in DL/difficulty managing student behaviors at home; lack of reliable adult supervision/DL assistance when parents and caregivers were working outside of the home; difficulty balancing parent/caregiver work from home with student DL needs; and more. In an effort to address student attendance and engagement, SSHS staff facilitated and/or participated in the collaborative development of **535 Engagement Support Plans**, and completed an unprecedented **1,363 home visits, up 426% from last academic year**.

What families were not as prepared to address as in years passed – whether due to their focus on survival, lack of access to technology or technology fatigue – was the mental and emotional toll of these stressors on themselves and their students. More long-term or traditionally in-person supports such as **school-based behavior intervention, mentoring, mental health counseling, psychoeducational groups, and referrals for community-based mental health services were down 65%** due in part to a lack of student presence of campus, disinterest in meeting via Zoom ("Zoom fatigue"), and family overwhelm with more pressing survival needs. As we

plan for the 2021-22 school year we anticipate a spike in these services, as students return to class and exhibit symptoms of grief, stress, and trauma from a year of unplanned DL, and as parents and caregivers have the luxury of attending to mental health with the increasing stability of our economy.

By the Numbers: Targeted (Tier 2) and Intensive (Tier 3) Services

Academic & Attendance Support	
504 Attendance & Facilitation	76
Academic Support	881
Attendance Intervention	1,064
Home Visit	1,363
IEP and MDT	119
Placement Assistance	15
SART/Engagement Support Plans	535
SST Attendance & Facilitation	243
Basic Needs & Resources	
Basic Needs (Clothing, Food, Utilities)**	2,071
Caregiver Education & Support	688
Employment/Financial	77
Homeless Program Referral	425
Independent Living Services	27
Interpretation/Translation	220
Legal Assistance	60
Recreation/After School	140
Transportation Assistance	47
Youth Leadership	171
Health	
COVID-19 Contact Tracing	1,323
Emergency Care Plans	2,617
Health Assessments (for IEP)	2,394
Health Care, Education, and Insurance	147
Home Hospital/Medical Independent Study	18
COVID-19 Contact Tracing	1,323
Mental Health & Wellness	
Behavior Intervention	123
Child Welfare & Child/Family Team Meetings	116
Conflict Resolution & Peer Mediation	27
Crisis Intervention	367
Domestic Violence/Shelter	46
Formal Assessment	24
LGBTQ Support	128
Mental Health Counseling	985
Mentoring	335
Psychoeducational Groups	145
Suicide Risk Assessments	291



*** Includes assistance with internet access and technology support for DL purposes.*

Feature: COVID-19 Contact Tracing

In addition to working tirelessly to offer COVID-19 testing and vaccines to students, staff, and the larger community, staff in our Health Services division performed contact tracing as it relates to exposures at school or work sites.

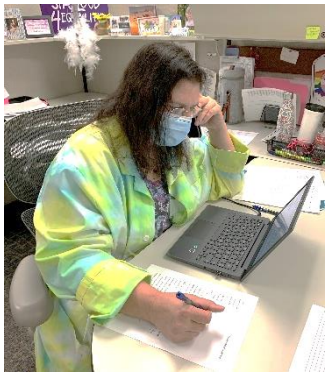


Photo 6: An SSHS Health Services Health Aide completes a contact tracing interview with a family.

Contact tracing is a process that slows the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Employers and schools are required to respond to cases of COVID-19 in order to prevent the spread of the virus at school/work sites. The sooner health officials are able to alert close contacts, the lower the risk of COVID-19 spreading further. Prompt and coordinated actions, including case investigation and contact tracing, may inform decision-making about strengthening and focusing mitigation strategies.

No outbreaks were associated with transmission at school sites. Virtually all cases were exposed outside of school. Between October 2020 and June 2021:

- **317 positive cases were contact traced** and provided isolation guidance
- **1,056 close contacts were contact traced** and provided quarantine guidance.

Feature: Crisis Response Shifts in Pandemic Era

SSHS leads SCUSD's Mental Health Crisis Response Team including training team members, deploying crisis teams to support school communities, and providing coordination and clinical consultation to schools experiencing a crisis situation. This team is activated in response to a variety of emergencies impacting a school community such as death of a student, staff, community member or community violence.

As the case with all services provided this school year, SSHS quickly pivoted from providing these critical services from in-person on school campuses to providing them virtually. During the 2020-21 school year, the SCUSD Mental Health Crisis Response Team effectively **responded to 13 crisis situations** providing caring, compassionate mental health **supports to 562 individuals**.

Feature: School Nursing in a Pandemic

Demands on school nurses were great this past year as nurses were looked to for information and support in the midst of the pandemic. All nurses were provided ongoing COVID-19 information and kept up-to-date, given COVID testing training, and contact tracing training. A team of nurses evaluated testing options and implemented the initial COVID-19 testing program rolled out with Health Aides. The School Nurses provided ongoing training and consulting support for the new Health Aides. The School Nurses provided contact tracing for their sites and district staff and students which involves case investigation, identification of exposures, quarantine of identified staff and students, and monitoring for follow up. They also provided support and consult to site staff, students and families navigating the challenges brought by the pandemic, encouraging maintenance of the mitigation measures. They tested, vaccinated, and provided support, information and links to resources. Many school nurses also joined with their student support co-workers supporting students with mental health crises, completing suicide risk assessments and referrals for mental health supports or other identified needs.

Photo 7: School nurses Tan Tung, Nho Le-Hinds, Eva Hipolito, and Paula Kuhlman at a vaccination clinic

Support in the Palms of their Hands: *Grace* App Launch

Taking care of our mental health and wellness can be challenging for all of us, especially for our students during the ongoing pandemic. In response to our newfound physical distance from them due to the pandemic, we sought to develop a universally accessible resource **created by students, for students**. In May 2021 we were thrilled to make this dream a reality, with the launch of SCUSD's first-ever Youth Mental Health and Wellness app, ***Grace (Giving Resources and Care Every day)***.

The *Grace* app helps students find community-based resources such as food, clothing, housing, mental health services, LGBTQ+ support; and offers in-app supports such as a calming room for anxiety and stress, and a friendly and interactive bot named Grace, who can answer questions and connect students to supports and resources quickly.

We are grateful to Kaiser Permanente for their generous funding, to the Prepared App team for their ingenuity in developing *Grace*, and the many students and staff who provided thoughtful guidance and feedback to ensure that the *Grace* app meets the ongoing needs of our students.

Since the launch of *Grace*:

- **Over 1,000 distinct users have clicked on the *Grace* website**
- **580 people have downloaded the app and actively use it**
- **An average of 175 people use the app each week**

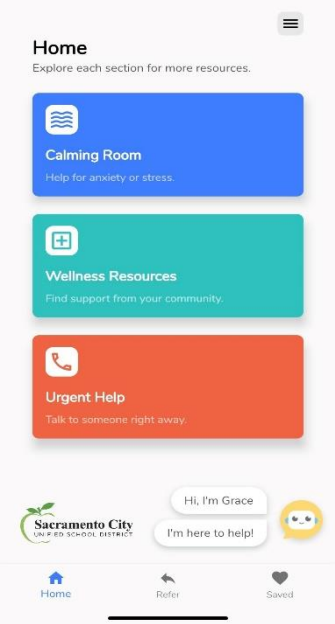


Photo 8: Screenshot of the Grace App home screen

For the 2021-22 school year, SSHS plans on continuing to expand the functionality of the *Grace* app by adding additional features to the Calming Room and the Grace chat bot. The app may be downloaded by visiting www.preparedapp.com/grace and in the Apple and Android stores.

Part Two: Training & Professional Development

SCUSD students and families deserve the best – that includes staff that are highly-trained and well-versed in evidence-based practices across disciplines.

Training the SCUSD Community

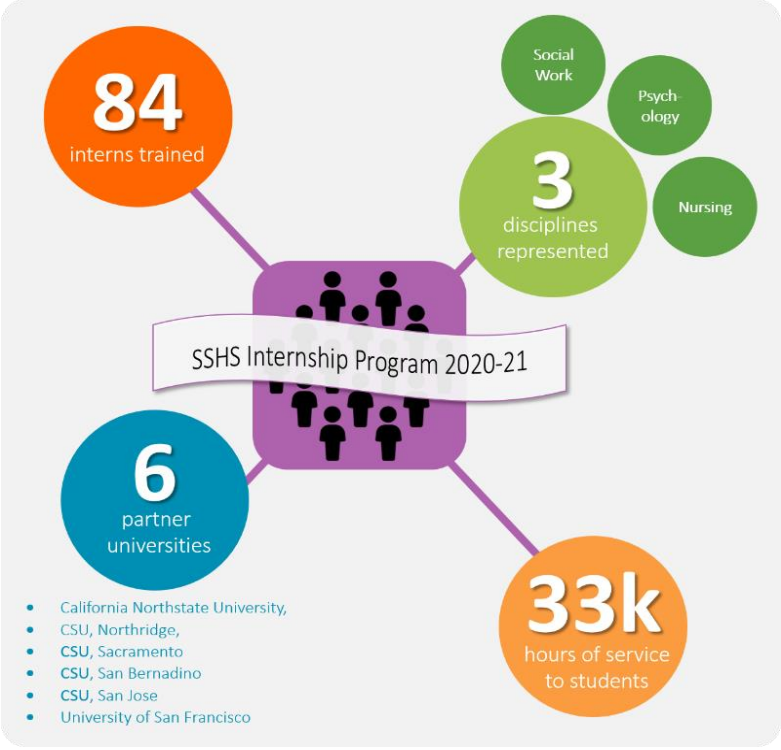
In an effort to contribute to the ongoing development of staff, teachers, parents, caregivers, students, and community partners, SSHS staff provided 64 trainings this academic year (a 23% increase from last year) to 3,806 participants, not including the 1,965 Kognito video simulation trainings for trauma-informed practice and suicide prevention.

Of note were the number of SSHS staff asked by their site administrators and staff to offer self-care, wellness, and trauma-informed practice trainings to employees, as they navigated not just their own increased stress from distance teaching, but managing their students' stress as well.

Internship Program

Our training program includes preparing the next generation of practitioners. This preparation also maximizes partnerships with higher education institutions to do training in the field on our school campuses for a mutually beneficial collaboration. Since 1999, SSHS has hosted and trained nearly 900 vocational, undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate interns.

In 2020-21 the internship program leveraged our staff's existing education and credentials to bring the **equivalent of 22 ten-month FTEs to our school sites, free of charge**. In addition to their duties in service to students and families, SSHS Specialists, School Social Workers, and School Nurses devoted time and energy as field instructors and preceptors for 84 interns who completed an average of 400 hours of site-based work between September and May.



This academic year:

- 29 CSUS Nursing interns provided 129 COVID-19 education classroom presentations, including COVID-19 basics, staying physically and mentally healthy through the pandemic, and myths vs. facts;

- 58 Social Work interns from five universities, and one Psychology Doctoral intern from California Northstate University
    - Contributed to the 124% increase in Tier 1 services by offering classroom interventions, placing outreach calls, and participating in distribution events;
    - Assisted in the **case management of 3,428 families**;
    - Helped make **2,620 linkages to basic needs resources**;
    - Offered drop-in groups, individual mentoring, and linkages to mental health services for social/emotional, mental wellness, and parent/caregiver support; and
    - Welcomed students back to campus with warmth and support when we all Returned Together!

Photo 9: Interns at Bret Harte's Student Support Center deliver holiday food, clothing, and gifts to families in need.

Department Focus: Healing Centered Engagement & Antiracist Practice

In addition to the impacts and trauma our SCUSD community has experienced due to COVID-19, many of our students, families and staff continue to experience ongoing trauma as a result of systemic racism and violence. Recent racist acts of violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, follow centuries of oppression. In alignment with our SSHS vision including that our families will have "equitable access to systems of support," SSHS owns its responsibility to recognize our own role in this trauma and the need to move beyond acknowledgement to engaging in courageous conversations and directly confronting, interrupting, and addressing the institutional racism that is present in our school system.

Thanks to funding from Kaiser Permanente, SSHS partnered with Flourish Agenda to begin this important work. **All Student Support Services staff participated in over twenty hours each of professional development in Healing Centered Engagement** (HCE), an asset-based and culturally-rooted approach to healing and well-being for young people of color and their adult allies. At the end of the 2020-21 school year, all Student Support Services staff became certified as Healing Centered Engagement practitioners.

In 2021-22, SSHS will continue to partner with Flourish Agenda to implement Phase 2 of Healing Centered Engagement. This will consist of two parts:

1. All Health Services and Foster Youth Services staff will complete the HCE certification training; and
2. Flourish Agenda staff will provide Student Support Service staff with ongoing coaching and technical assistance to integrate the HCE principles and strategies in department practices, policies, and procedures.

Part Three: Awards and Honors

In addition to the award of numerous grants (detailed below in Part Five), SSHS was humbled to be recognized this year by national and statewide organizations for the work we are so dedicated to doing.

Statewide Recognition: *Beacons of Hope* Report

In addition to a professional ethic of social justice and equity, and continued professional development around these principles, this year SSHS was recognized for its work in furthering equity.

The California Partnership for the Future of Learning lifted up SSHS' prioritization of student mental health in their 2021 report "Beacons of Hope: Stories of Transformation and Equity in California Schools" (California Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2021). The feature included SSHS' use of student data to identify needs through the Early Identification and Intervention System (EIIS), school-based Student Support Centers utilizing an MTSS framework, our comprehensive suicide prevention program, and offering multiple pathways to reach students and families, such as the Wellness Warmline, Virtual Calming Room, and the new *Grace* app.

National Award: Leadership in Mental Health Advocacy

Student Support Services Coordinator Jacqueline Rodriguez, LCSW received the Leadership In Mental Health Advocacy Award from Kognito Education. The award "recognizes a district leader who has gone above and beyond to support and advocate for mental health initiatives," and is given to only six individuals across the country. Jacqueline and SCUSD were recognized during the 2020 Kognito Education Award Program in October 2020.

Part Four: Staffing & Budget

For budget and staffing purposes, SSHS operates in three divisions: The Foster Youth Services division, the Health Services division, and the Support Services. The majority of funding invested into the SSHS department is spent on staffing, with the remaining operations funds being spent to provide and/or improve upon the services and supports to students and families.

Given the large amount of funds that school sites, departments, the district and grant-funders provide, the SSHS department values accountability and transparency for the services provided by staff. SSHS participates in all district Medi-Cal billing programs, helping generate funding for services and the staff who provide them

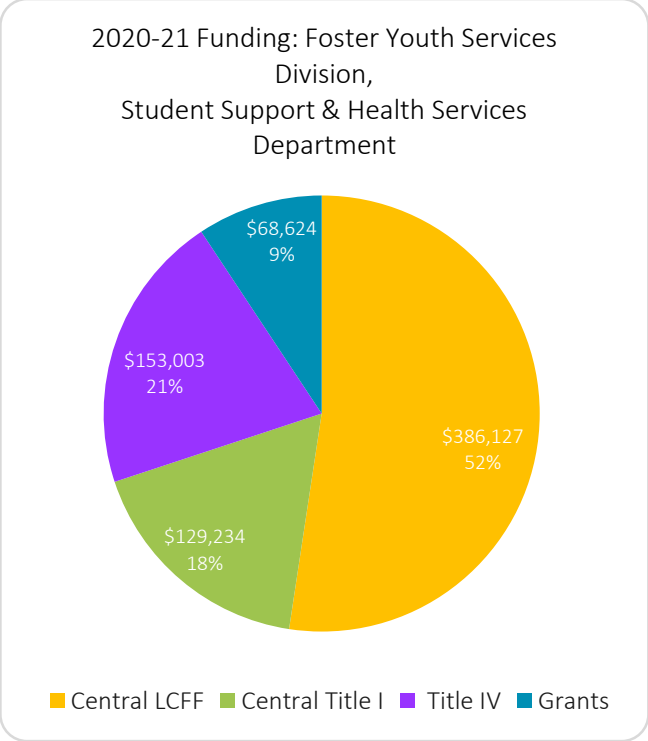
Staffing

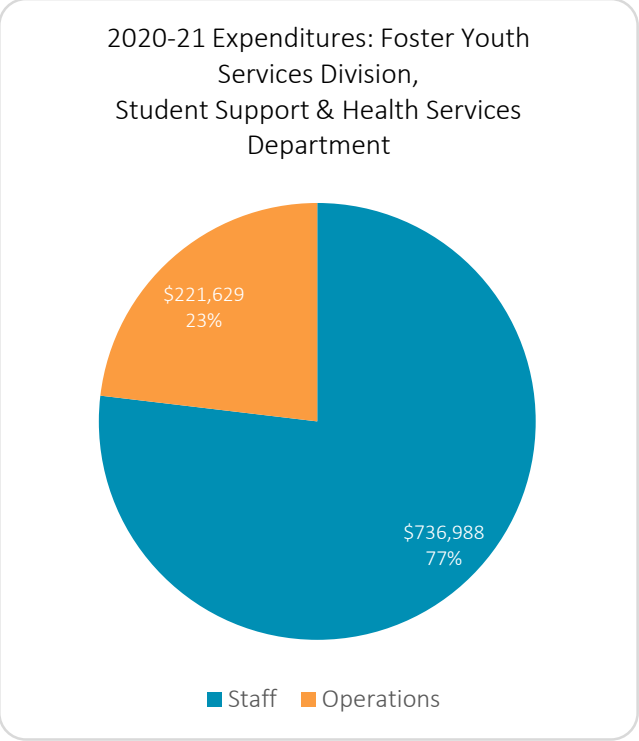
SSHS is made up of 94 caring and committed employees, **91% of whom are engaged in daily direct service to students** and families. The majority of SSHS staff are clinically-trained, holding master's degrees (or higher) in social work, nursing, and/or counseling.

Position	# of Positions	Total FTE
Foster Youth Services Division		
Coordinator II, Foster Youth	1	1.00
Youth Services Specialist	1	1.00
Program Associate	5	5.00
Clerk III	1	1.00
Instructional Aide	1	0.75
School Community Liaison	1	0.25
Division Total	*10*	*9.00*
Health Services Division		
Coordinator II	1	1.00
Lead School Nurse	2	2.00
School Nurse	27	25.09
Health Services Technician	1	1.00
Health Services Clerk	4	3.50
Health Services Aide III	1	0.4375
Home Hospital Teacher	4	4.00
Division Total	*40*	*37.03*
Support Services Division		
Coordinator II, Student Support Services	1	1.00
Coordinator, Mental Health	1	1.00
Coordinator I, Learning Support Services	2	2.00
Program Coordinator, Homeless	1	1.00
Specialist II, Learning Support Services	13	13.00
School Social Worker	19	18.80
Student & Family Support Specialist	1	1.00
Youth & Family Mental Health Advocate	4	4.00
FACE Program Technician	1	1.00
Division Total	*43*	*42.80*
Director III	1	1.00
Department Total	***94***	***89.83***

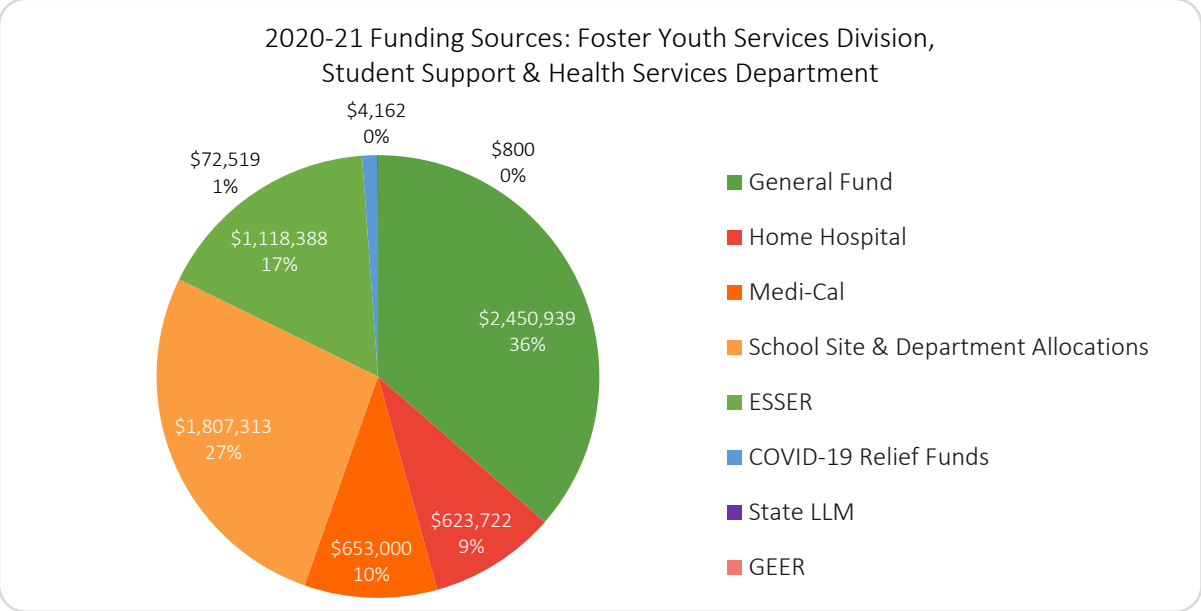
Budget

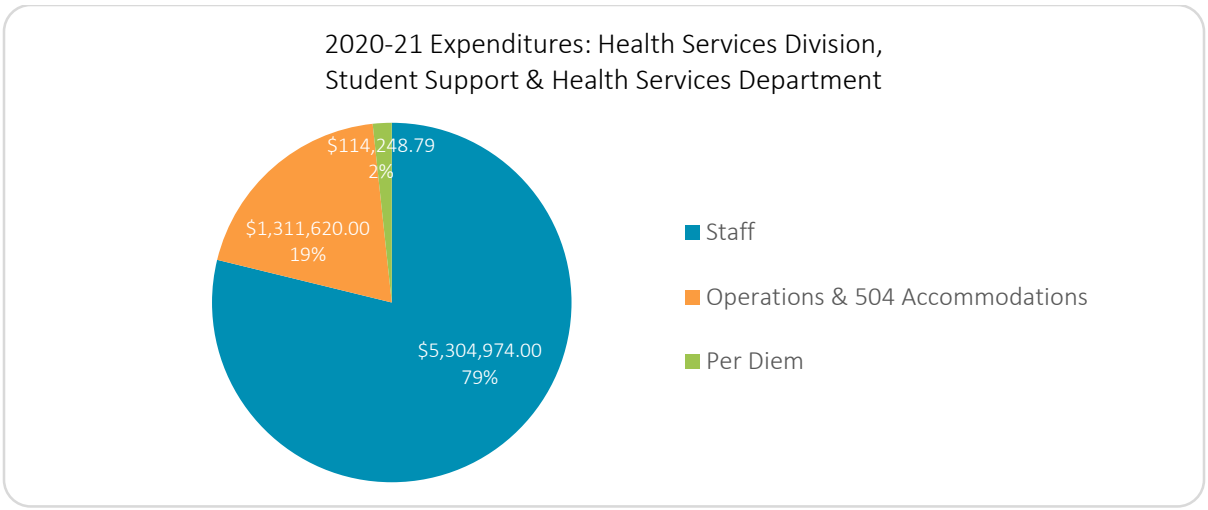
Foster Youth Services



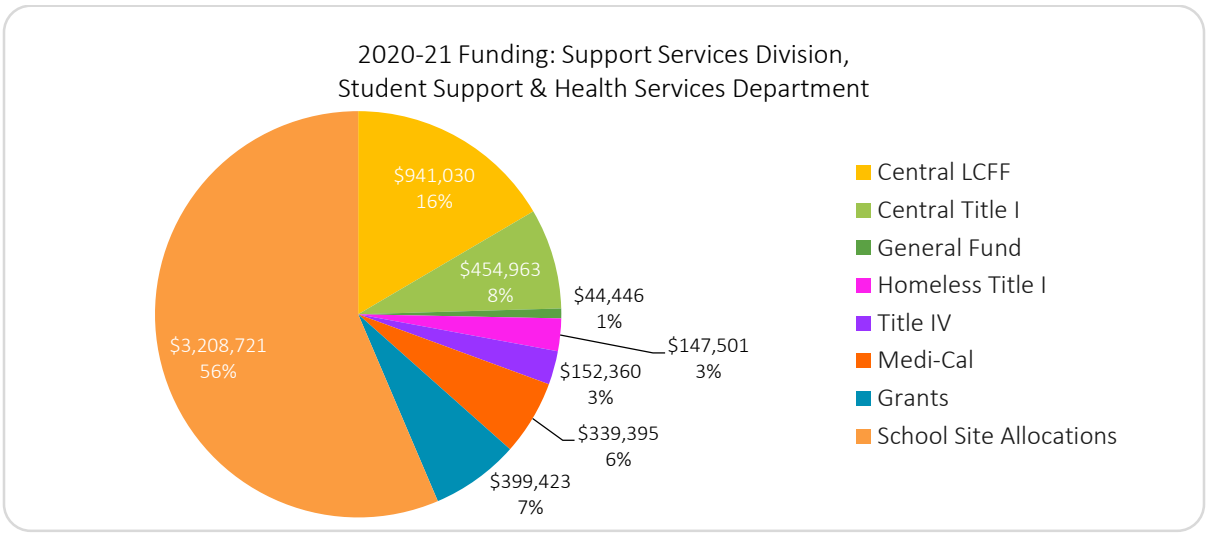


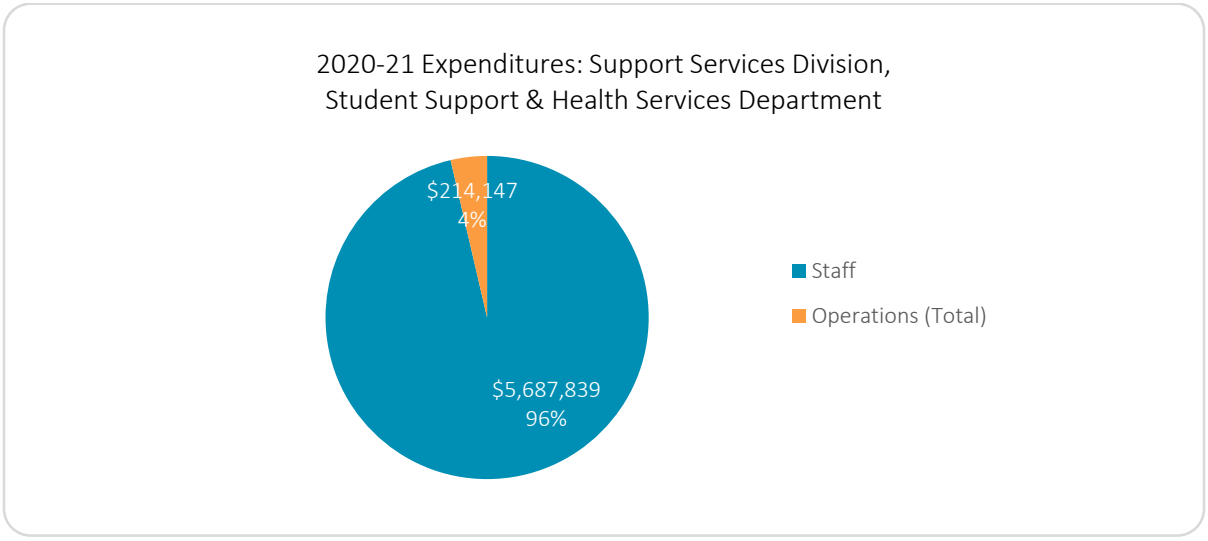
Health Services





Student Support Services





Part Five: Looking Ahead

Expanding Services in a Time of Need

Given the challenges and difficulties that our students and families navigate every day, and which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, SSHS is thrilled to be making and implementing plans to expand critically-important services in 2021-22 and beyond!

California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP)

SSHS is honored to have been awarded a $2.5 million 2020 California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) Grant. This three-year grant will allow for the expansion of the Student Support Center's community-school model by creating a South Sacramento Community Schools (SSCS) Consortium consisting of a network of five South Sacramento Schools: Luther Burbank High, John Still K-8, Rosa Parks K-8, Nicholas Elementary and Parkway Elementary. These five schools were identified based on several factors: 1) schools located within the zip code most impacted by COVID-19, and 2) schools showing as the highest need by the SCUSD Student Services Equity Index.

Student Support Center staff will provide school-based mental health services and case management to link students and families to local resources for a myriad of basic needs and physical/mental/behavioral health needs. Funding through this grant opportunity will provide a supportive pathway for all schools in the SSCS Consortium that follows students from preschool through 12th grade.

CARES Act Funding to Increase Services to Students and Families

Federal CARES Act dollars will allow every student access to a caring, compassionate, and highly-skilled professional, as SSHS increases staffing across divisions:

Increasing Student Supports at School Sites

21. 4 FTE additional School Social Workers & 8.2 FTE additional SSC Coordinators will:

- Provide support at all schools (distribution of staff based on student need);
- Coordinate services to maximize resources;
- Individual, group, and family counseling
- Crisis intervention; home visits; parent support and education; and advocacy for students, families, and school systems;
- Identify and address unmet physical & mental health needs.

Increasing Critical Supports for LGBTQ-identified Students

2 FTE additional School Social Workers will:

- Expand the breadth and depth of services provided to students who identify as LGBTQ+ by providing intensive case management, referrals, short-term mental health supports, groups and assistance with name and gender updates in IC;
- Develop and support GSA Clubs; and
- Offer staff professional development, staff consultation, and LGBTQ+ youth conference support.

Increasing Supports for Our Most Vulnerable – Foster Youth and Students Experiencing Homelessness

2 FTE additional Foster Youth Services Program Associates will:

- Maintain caseloads of approximately 1:50 in order to provide intensive supports to students and families, including weekly check-ins; and
- Provide coordination of services including mentoring, social skills, mental health counseling, academic tutoring, independent living skills, recreation and youth development, etc.

1 FTE School Social Worker and 1 FTE Youth & Family Mental Health Advocate will:

- Maintain caseloads of approximately 1:60 in order to provide intensive supports to students and families
- Provide intensive case management, follow-up and coordination, including housing support, basic needs, school supplies, mentoring, mental health counseling, academic tutoring, and more

Furthermore, a $125,000 contract will expand tutoring for these students will:

- Address the disproportionate impact and loss of educational support caused by the pandemic for our most vulnerable students;
- Be tailored to the unique needs of students and families with specialization in engagement and relationship building; and
- Be provided via both in-home and on-line options with built-in assessment and progress monitoring.

Education for Homeless Children and Youth

The EHCY Grant will fund an additional 1.0 FTE Youth and Family Mental Health Advocate (YFMHA) who will be primarily responsible for identification of and support for homeless students who are chronically absent or at risk of being chronically absent. The YFMHA will work closely with sites and families to help remove barriers that may be impacting a student's ability to attend school regularly.

Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO)

The California Department of Education will be funding the training and tools we need to do our jobs well, through an Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) grant that SSHS was awarded. The ELO grant will fund:

- **Universal Suicide Prevention for Staff and Students**: Use of the online Kognito training platform, which will provide self-paced modules for staff and students, allowing SCUSD to meet State-mandated Suicide Prevention training;
- **Trauma-informed training for school site staff**, facilitated by SCUSD's Student Support & Health Services department and Student Support Center staff.
- **Capacity-Building for Community School Teams** through the Family Engagement Learning Institute: The Family Engagement Training is a 2-day training for school stakeholder teams. The teams assist with assessing present family engagement practices, implementing activities, evaluating next steps and continuing to improve and coordinate practices for the engagement of families.
- **Enhanced communication vehicles:** Cell phones for use by Student Support Center staff are a highly successful outreach strategy as evidenced by high-service volume even during the pandemic when many students/families have been disengaged.
- **Near-Peer Mental Health & Wellness Support and Youth Workforce Development**: Partnership with PRO Youth & Families and Youth Forward to implement a near-peer mentorship model of support with a specific focus on youth of color and youth identifying as LGBTQ+ and a youth mental wellness workforce development project for SCUSD students. The partnership will expand the range of mental health supports available to students to support and promote their well-being.

- **Flourish Agenda Training**: Student Support and Health Services staff will complete the Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) training/coaching by end of school year - this next level of training will focus on implementation of healing centered practices and policies.
- **Mindful Schools Mindful Educator Training**: provides professional development to support our staff in learning ways to manage stress and build resilience as well as develops staff skills in utilizing mindfulness strategies to provide compassionate, social emotional interventions.
- **Foster Youth Education Summit**: Provide professional development to Foster Youth Services staff to stay current and relevant on supporting students.
- **California School Nurses Association (CSNO) Training for School Nurses**: Training for school staff on strategies to engage students and families in addressing students' social-emotional health and academic needs via conferences.

In addition to the new grants that will fund this expansion of services, we are grateful to be able continue providing suicide prevention and intervention training funded by a generous contribution from Kaiser Permanente and a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Diving Deeper into Evaluation: Including Evidence-based Indicators in EIIS and Practice

The SSHS department values student and family agency, evidence-based practices and data-based decision making. We believe that living these values, from the design of our systems, policies, and procedures to our daily practice, will:

- Empower students, families and communities to identify and pursue their own goals in our work together, setting the stage for more sustainable success; and
- Allow the SSHS department to
    - measure impact,
    - be accountable to our students, families, school sites, District, and larger community; and
    - continuously improve services and supports.

Collecting and examining data is a professional value and an activity that SSHS has undertaken as a department, for decades. To date, the tools at our disposal were largely limited to tracking services. While this helped us better understand the needs of our students and families, tell their collective stories, and more effectively advocate for them, we also wanted to be able to examine the ways in which our services may impact them. Because we work with human beings who cannot ethically be summed up into check-boxes or numbers, and because there are myriad forces at work in their lives, we knew we had to be deeply thoughtful and highly critical when exploring this next phase of our evaluation work.

Over the 2020-2021 school year, the team of Student Support Specialists and School Social Workers who make up our department's Data Committee worked to identify an evidence-based tool that would allow the SSHS department to go beyond service tracking and begin exploring outcomes. After reviewing over thirty evidence-based assessments, the department adopted the **Family Development Matrix (FDM)**. Listed in the Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Abuse Prevention, the FDM is a strengths-based tool for assessment, collaborative care planning and tracking student and family progress across five key areas:

- school connectedness,
- behavior,
- social emotional health,
- safety, and
- basic needs.

Seven FDM indicators will be integrated into the EIIS Student Support Database. Through a collaborative conversation, SSHS staff and trained interns will work with students and/or their families to identify their status in each of the seven indicators. This will be done at the start of services in the initial assessment, and again at twelve-week intervals through the school year, or until services end.

Safe/Self-Sufficient:	I (my child) feel good about myself; I am willing to change and grow; I have effective problem-solving skills.
Stable:	I (my child) see possibilities of change and can begin to acknowledge areas of strength, begin to be hopeful.
At Risk:	I (my child) usually feel unhappy about myself and life; I have an unstable mental health condition.
In Crisis:	I (my child) have an unclear thought process; feel hopeless; have an untreated mental health condition.

Figure 1: Sample FDM Indicator for social emotional health.

Ushering in the use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

SSHS staff serving at school sites in SCUSD's Cohort 1 of the Data-based Decision-making (DBDM) effort to achieve District-wide adoption of the MTSS framework reported a sense of excitement following year-long training sessions with their teams! Staff were pleased to learn that our department's evidence-based, data-driven approach to curating case plans using a tiered approach is one that every school site will be participating in. We look forward to engaging in and supporting this critical work as it moves forward!

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Stewart, Gabrielle
Stewart, Jenifer
Stonier, Terri
Struhs, Mary
Tamanaha, Fumi
Thompson, Kelly
Tisdell-Koroma, Evelyn
Torres, Elizabeth
Tung, Tan
Turnquist, Victoria (Vickie)
Tyulyu, Anna
Valle, Irene
Wall, Rebecca
Webb, Rachel
Weiss, Amaya
White, Michael
Wurschmidt-Owens, Renae
Yang, Mai

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