CYBHI
Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

LISTEN TO THIS AUDIOCAST // cybhi.chhs.ca.gov/humboldtcoe/

## *Humboldt County Office of Education | Humboldt County, CA*

*The Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative's (CYBHI) Stories from the Field series aims to highlight the critical work being done to address the behavioral health needs of children and youth, as well as the ongoing efforts to improve systems and create sustainable change. These stories showcase the values and vision of the Initiative through personal experiences, composite stories, and audiocasts, and demonstrate how the CYBHI can build on existing efforts, learn from them, and work towards scalable and systemic change.*

*Learn more about this work and listen to all of the audiocasts in this series at* ***cybhi.chhs.ca.gov/humboldtcoe/.***

### BUILDING A LOCAL MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE THROUGH CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) serves 31 school districts in a mostly rural area of Northern California. As an agency working within a rural context, HCOE prioritizes developing collaborative partnerships as a strategy for breaking down silos and maximizing services and supports for students. This partnership approach extends to HCOE's work supporting youth, family, and community mental health and well-being, which most recently resulted in an innovative career and technical education (CTE) initiative.

The initiative, a product of local cross-agency collaboration, centers on a new high school elective course designed to grow the county's behavioral health workforce by engaging the next generation of potential mental health providers—today's high school students. Four local high schools, including one high school on the Hoopa Valley Reservation, are piloting the new CTE elective this year. HCOE is working to develop the funding and infrastructure needed to sustain the program into the future.

## A Proactive Approach

The development of the new CTE elective reflects HCOE's overall approach to supporting student mental health and well-being. This approach focuses on developing proactive, rather than reactive, solutions to challenges faced by the local community. HCOE decided to offer the CTE elective on mental health in response to a projected demand for mental and behavioral health professionals in the community. The new course also helps to address the lack of robust career pathways for high school students interested in entering the mental health field. Relatedly, HCOE places an emphasis on building a broad system of mental health supports that emphasizes preventative services and early intervention to address emerging needs. As Peter Stoll, Director of Prevention and Intervention Services at HCOE, explains,

> ***The more that we can create that culture of support and awareness, whether it's through trainings around suicide prevention or looking at youth mental health first aid or even restorative practice, all of those work hand-in-hand to create a network of support for students.***

## Strengthened by Cross-Agency Collaboration

Partnerships have been, and continue to be, essential to the development of HCOE's new CTE pathway in mental and behavioral health. HCOE is currently working with the Vesper Society, Cal Poly Humboldt Social Work Department, Two Feathers Family Services, local school districts, and other local organizations to provide students taking the new CTE elective with a combination of relevant academic and clinical learning opportunities. As Colby Smart, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services for HCOE, says,

> ***Any time we can get together with multiple agencies to talk about a centralized challenge—in this case, developing [a] mental health career workforce—is a good thing because it allows us to bring our various lenses to the table to ultimately create a more holistic and more impactful opportunity for kids.***

## Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Course Design

Teachers in each of the four participating schools are adapting the new elective course to their local school and community contexts. For Shoshoni Gensaw-Hostler and Luis Scott, who co-teach the course at Hoopa Valley High School on the Hoopa Valley Reservation, it was essential that the course be offered by indigenous people and that the curriculum be grounded in indigenous knowledge, practices, and perspectives.

With this in mind, the course is intentional about recognizing how mental health can be intergenerational, is impacted by systems of oppression, and is related to other aspects of well-being. For example, students created and interpreted genograms to explore the connections between family relationships, generational patterns of psychology and behavior, and physical health. Lastly, the course at Hoopa Valley High School is responsive to students' experiences, with a focus on making it relevant to their everyday lives. As Shoshoni Gensaw-Hostler shared,

> ***We've really come at this course from a place of presenting evidence-based practices, and also practice-based knowledge, because it's in an indigenous community. And we want to acknowledge and utilize that practice-based knowledge that, through thousands and thousands of years, has proven to be effective and [that] works and feels genuine and authentic and people will utilize it within this community.***

### The Impact

The long-term impact of HCOE's new CTE initiative on the county's mental and behavioral health workforce will not be known for some time. However, the program's short-term goals for students are equally important. For educators like Shoshoni Gensaw-Hostler, the elective has not only been an opportunity to help students see mental health as a potential career path in their future, but also to offer students meaningful skills and tools that they can use in the present to support their own mental health and well-being.

As Shoshoni shared,

> *So really, we kind of went to what skills or knowledge would we have really loved as youth—what would have been really critical to being able to maybe handle trauma or handle life's difficulties that we didn't have as youth that we would have really appreciated and loved. ... What are the skills needed for them to come up with their own? How do you decipher and come up with a decision that works for you? And how do you give understanding and context to your fellow person so that you can be supportive?*

**TABLE 1. HOOPA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL INFORMATION**

| Number of students served by Hoopa Valley High School in 2021–22 | 267 |
|---|---|
| Geographic Setting | Rural |
| Grades Served | 9–12 |
| School Model | Public school |

**TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHICS OF HOOPA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

| Student Demographic | Percentage Served |
|---|---|
| Native American/Indigenous | 81.6% |
| White | 8.6% |
| Latinx | 7.9% |
| Black or African American | 0.7% |
| Multiracial | 0.7% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0.4% |
| Students with disabilities | 23.2% |
| Foster youth | 3.4% |
| Unhoused youth | 18.4% |
| Socioeconomically disadvantaged | 72.7% |

*Data sourced from the California School Dashboard.*

**TABLE 3. HUMBOLDT COUNTY INFORMATION**

| Number of Students Served in Humboldt County Public Schools in 2021–22 | 17,608 |
|---|---|
| Number of School Districts | 31 |
| Number of Comprehensive High Schools | 9 |
| Number of Alternative Schools | 12 |
| Geographic Setting | Rural |

**TABLE 4. DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY**

| Student Demographic | Percentage Served |
|---|---|
| White | 55.1% |
| Latinx | 19.8% |
| Multiracial | 9.6% |
| Native American/Indigenous | 9.1% |
| Asian | 3.4% |
| Black or African American | 1.2% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0.4% |
| Filipino | 0.2% |
| English language learners | 7.1% |
| Socioeconomically disadvantaged | 52.5% |

*Data sourced from Ed-Data.org.*

### Questions to consider while you listen...

- The Humboldt County Office of Education and its partners have designed a CTE course to support efforts toward growing and sustaining a local mental and behavioral health workforce. **What strategies are your district or county implementing to build a local mental and behavioral health workforce?**
- Teachers offering the new mental and behavioral health elective in Hoopa Valley High School emphasize the importance of adapting the curriculum to be culturally responsive and sustaining. **How might your school, district, or county work toward making its mental and behavioral health initiatives more culturally responsive, drawing from the community's strengths, values, and history?**

© 2023 WestEd. All Rights Reserved.