

LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS TAKE LEARNING TO SCALE



**SUPERINTENDENT
 MARTY BREWER**
 PORT ANGELES SCHOOL DISTRICT
 PORT ANGELES, WA



District Enrollment
3,544

Grades Served
K-12

Students of Color Enrolled
30%

Economically Disadvantaged
60%

After a year of budget cuts, and a pause on gathering community input through CEE’s Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES), Superintendent Marty Brewer of Port Angeles School District (PASD) was eager to re-engage his district’s stakeholders, but he and his team had defined a new and pressing need.

Like so many districts, PASD needed to find an effective and efficient way to learn what their 3,500 K-12 students were experiencing, and particularly as a result of the pandemic. “We needed better data to make better decisions in support of growing student needs.” Brewer added.

As Brewer recounts, *“We had stopped using CEE’s EES surveys in a time of budget reductions in 2018-19. In 20-21, we recognized our need to re-engage our families and staff and began using EES surveys again. We also added the Student Universal Wellness Screener (SUWS) for the first time. It had become a high priority.”*

SUWS Data Provides Adults ‘Teachable Moments’

PASD’s decision to use the SUWS meant it would have data about students generated by the students themselves. They did so knowing the resulting data from students had the potential to create some discomfort, or ‘teachable moments’ for the organization. As Brewer shared, “Sometimes data knocks us out of our comfort zone and causes us to reflect on what needs to change. That’s how our system learns.”

Assistant Superintendent, Michelle Olsen echoed the importance of adding the SUWS to generate much needed data. “The EES gave us overall organizational health data, but we needed a systemic approach to organize our anecdotal student wellness data.” As the impacts of the pandemic were better understood, a more intentional approach to being responsive became possible. Olsen added, “We knew students had a tremendous need for academic support, but we also dug into disparities experienced by individual students such as internet access, food scarcity, and their social and emotional needs.”

WHY IS THE SUWS SO EFFECTIVE?

“The SUWS systemically captures student voice. We had the right mindset, but we didn’t have the right toolbox to be systemic in our response.”

Michelle Olsen

TOOLS AND SUPPORTS USED



Educational Effectiveness
Surveys™ (EES)



Student Universal
Wellness Screener



Strategic Planning
Data Dashboard

The SUWS Expanded PASD's MTSS Radar

Despite having a growing MTSS system in place, leaders and staff at all levels of the district desired to be even more proactive and responsive. “We had a very good sense of the range of student needs across the system, but no clear way to validate our tiered responses. The SUWS allowed us to use student-generated data to confirm and address their needs.” Olsen summarized a thorny challenge that faces every school district under any circumstances: identifying students with internalizing (aka, hidden) behaviors. This is a challenge for all systems simply because the behaviors include withdrawal, shutting down, avoidance, and struggles known only to the student.

“In addition to those students with more observable behavior, it provided us a window into those students who were not on our radar.”

Across the district, staff used SUWS data to follow up with each student whose responses warranted additional inquiry. “The SUWS confirmed much of what we felt we knew about students with observable behavior, but we learned valuable information on previously unrecognized students. We needed a better radar. The SUWS has given us that.”

From a district perspective, the ability to screen, detect, and serve students based on data across academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs is integral to an evidence-based MTSS – especially for students with internalized behaviors. But what about at schools and in classrooms?

A Whole Child Focus for Each Child

As of 2024, PASD has nine schools working in concert to implement the district's MTSS system. With the SUWS administered in the fall and spring of each school year, staff at each school examine data at a granular level. Rhonda Kromm, Principal at Jefferson Elementary, shared, “Before SUWS, it was more happenstance, really. It was observation, conversations, and questioning. The SUWS brings more students to our attention who otherwise might have gone undetected.”

Echoing that reality, Jefferson Elementary Counselor Vicki Rockholt added, “We really didn't have a student-specific survey. The SUWS allowed us to focus on needed resources, mental health counseling, and the whole child.” Case management and tracking responses to student needs became transparent, “In terms of coordinating our approach, it has allowed us to communicate with teachers about the students in their classrooms.” Just as important, “When elementary students transition to middle school, the staff there know their needs on day one because this information has been shared with them.”

How vital has the SUWS become in PASD? Kromm's response provides insight. “We definitely count this as an essential MTSS tool. This is how we find students in need of assistance and provide them with different tiers of support, whether it's needing to talk to someone or leads to making connections to social workers.”

The Road Ahead: A Multi-year Million-dollar MTSS Grant

How serious is PASD about closing gaps for all students and improving the effectiveness of their MTSS system districtwide? Serious enough to center the PASD 4-year strategic plan around creating equity, inclusive of a goal specifically on SEL. Also, serious enough to apply for and land a multi-year 1-million-dollar OSPI Title IV A: Stronger Connections Grant focused on building the capacity of the district to meet student needs within a MTSS framework. The grant focused on district MTSS coordinators collaborating and working with buildings and across the district to implement action plans and install a reliable system of supports for academics, behavior, SEL, and attendance inclusive of community partners.

With the SUWS now implemented across the district and integral to its MTSS system, PASD's vision of using data to engage in evidence-based practice is becoming a reality.

As Superintendent Brewer summarized,

"I advocate for the tools and resources our staff need to engage in the work our community has agreed is a priority. We budget in alignment with those priorities. The Student Universal Wellness Screener is an investment that allows us to ensure equitable practices for student success. This work is our priority, so is the SUWS. We won't go without it."

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Assistant Superintendent
Michelle Olsen

"As a school counselor, I was thrilled we used the data to write a Tier 1 schoolwide goal in the building's school improvement plan. We'll use the SUWS data to help us monitor how effective we are collectively."

Counselor Vicki Rockholt
Jefferson Elementary

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