

A Transformational Ecology Model of School Based Universal Mental Health Development

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Abstract : Understanding that children thrive in a multi-systems approach to mental health development, a growing number of schools often promote school-based positive youth development however, there is scant empirical evidence investigating effective school-based “wraparound” mental health services for low income, Latinx children and their families. This 10-month case study utilizes a sample of 281 low-income, Latinx parents and their children, and 23 K-5th grade teachers living in northern California to test the hypothesis that a school-based mental health program can strengthen students’ developmental asset attainment and positively impact the school environment. The study utilized triangulated data to ascertain the effects of two program levels - (a) mental health and (b) positive child development services. All services were site-based and meant to target a wide variety of families. Findings from the study report that the universal mental health program increased the developmental asset attainment in 5 out of 8 thriving indicators thus transforming the child within his/her environment. Data collected from the administrative referral report demonstrate that the project also positively impacted the school climate. Parents and teachers felt more connected to the school, and referrals were down for discipline (35%), academics (66%), and suspensions (51%). The study concludes that a transformational ecology model of positive child development is the most effective means to nurture connections to all socializing agencies in a child’s ecosystem.

Keywords : case study, child development, positive youth development, developmental assets, ecological systems theory

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