

Waunakee Community School District fought increasing student anxiety... and won!

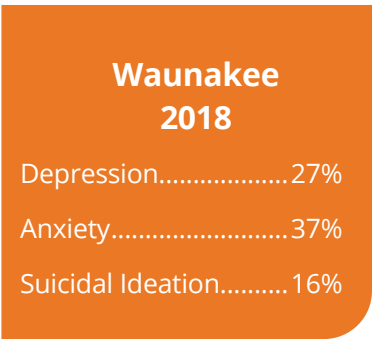
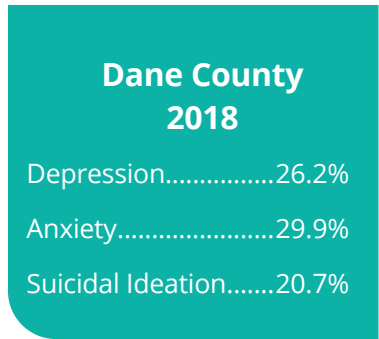
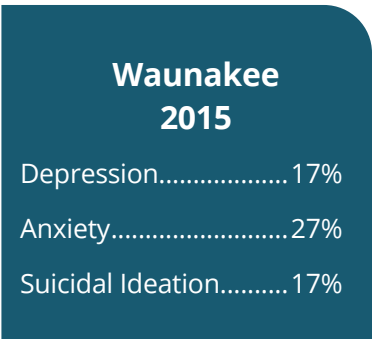
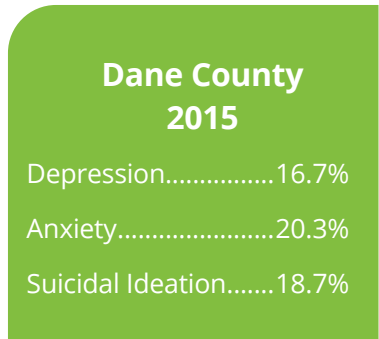
BASC-3 & SSIS SEL
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The battle against pressure to perform, depression, and anxiety in Waunakee

As Waunakee school staff members were reviewing data from the 2015 and 2018 Dane County Youth Assessments (DCYA), they became concerned with the results which showed increasing rates of depression and anxiety. Among the most prominent challenges impacting their students' mental health was "pressure to perform" with 63 percent reporting "pressure to perform in school" as one of their greatest stressors.

Waunakee Intermediate School Psychologist Kristen Thompson recalled, "After reading the 2018 DCYA results, our district Student Services team was concerned with the increase in self-reported depression and anxiety. Moreover, the consistent reports of suicidal ideation was alarming."

The city of Waunakee, a fast-growing, affluent community outside the state capitol of Madison, rises out of the corn fields of south-central Wisconsin, attracting families looking for more space and excellent schools. While the sign welcoming visitors to town declares Waunakee to be the "Only Waunakee in the World", its school district faces challenges that are certainly not unique — assessing and supporting the social, emotional, and behavioural needs of their students.



**Percentage of students who reported feeling depressed, anxious, and/or suicidal during the 30 days prior to assessment.*

“ I am concerned about how many students are depressed and seeing psychologists or psychiatrists,” admitted Waunakee Intermediate School Principal, Chris Hetzel. “The number is ever-growing and it seems like it wasn’t like this years ago.”

Waunakee schools were facing several obstacles with their existing assessment tools. First, they did not receive the assessment results in a timely fashion. Second, the tools and resources did not align with Wisconsin's newly identified Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies, and tiered instructional materials were not readily accessible. Lastly, the record forms were cumbersome for staff members to complete and score. Considering how rapidly Waunakee was growing, finding a more efficient and effective mental health assessment process was paramount for the success — and safety — of their students.

Forging the "Whole Child"

Thankfully, Waunakee Community School District Student Services staff recognized the importance of preparing students academically and emotionally for the challenges of their schooling and beyond. "We have students who are highly successful academically, but struggle with interpersonal skills and relationships," reflected Megan Galdes, School Psychologist at Waunakee Community High School. "To function productively in all aspects of life, students need both academic and emotional support in order to thrive; it is the only way to educate the 'whole child'.

"Our high school is academically demanding, so we needed an assessment tool that did a better job identifying mental health needs associated with academic stressors. It was important that we assessed students' risk for internalizing issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem."



Early Behavioural Interventions Improve Likelihood of Academic Success

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We need to provide students with social and emotional instruction and consistent support early in their academic careers. If we wait until they are high school age, research shows that unproductive and maladaptive behaviours and coping skills will be much harder to change.”

– Kristen Thompson, Psychologist,
Waunakee Intermediate School

A Comprehensive Solution that “Sizzles” for Waunakee Students

The WCSD selected Pearson’s Social Skills Improvement System, Social Emotional Learning (SSIS™ SEL), for their K–6 students. SSIS SEL covers the entire assessment cycle of screening, assessing, intervening, and monitoring progress with evidence-based tools that are aligned with the CASEL framework. It addresses the five SEL domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and is the only solution available today that also assesses academic competencies in reading, mathematics, and motivation to learn.

“With our previous screener, we could identify broad internalizing and externalizing issues, but we were not able to hone in on specific lagging skills that could be addressed by teachers and/or other staff members on a day-to-day basis,” recalled Thompson. “The SSIS SEL fills the gaps that our previous screener did not. The ‘sizzle,’ as we like to call it, provides recommended interventions and instruction for the social, emotional, and executive functioning skills that we believe are necessary to support the ‘whole child.’”

The SSIS SEL is a turnkey, digitized system that provides educators with a comprehensive social and emotional skills learning solution that is aligned with multi-tiered interventions. It includes highly visual slides, videos, role-playing exercises, and cue cards that deliver an engaging learning experience for all students.

Results of the SSIS SEL screener are available immediately so interventions can begin sooner. “We are now able to screen every student and get results early in the year so that we can make informed decisions about appropriate interventions for classrooms, small groups, and/or individual students. Additional time for remediation is important to us,” noted Thompson.

Hetzel agrees. “The SSIS SEL has worked well because we get the results quickly and are able to start working with our students early in the fall term. With the previous tool, we were able to start working with our students in late winter. What good does that do?”

“ We selected Pearson’s SSIS SEL because it provides a screener, individualized assessment, and instructional components. It is flexible to our needs, has increased efficiency in designing and delivering interventions, and has contributed to a more effective Multi-Levelled System of Support. ”

– Kristen Thompson, Psychologist,
Waunakee Intermediate School

Efficient assessments facilitate appropriate interventions that prepare students to succeed

Waunakee Community High School and Waunakee Community Middle School use the Behavior Assessment System for Children™, Third Edition (BASC™-3 BESS) to assess internalizing, externalizing, and adaptive skill risks and deliver remediation options that are specifically aligned with the results. According to Galdes, “The consistency of the results between BASC-3 BESS and our school-based data gave us confidence that the assessment is reliable and valid for our population.”

“Without the behavioural assessment and remediation solutions provided by Pearson, we would be in a more reactive place, moving from one crisis to the next. These tools allow us to address student needs in a more proactive way.”

– Megan Galdes, Psychologist, Waunakee Community High School

BASC-3 BESS includes evidence-based interventions that remediate the most commonly identified problem behaviours seen by teachers and parents and reported by adolescents. It includes small-group activities and classroom-based lessons to develop core behavioural and emotional skills like communicating, problem solving, listening effectively, and relationship strategies.

The Waunakee school population is growing quickly so the district needed an assessment that was easy to use and wouldn't take students out of the classroom. Galdes recounted, “The Waunakee school district provides every secondary-level student with a Google Chromebook, so we are able to deliver the student rating form electronically. We send a link to all students and ask the homeroom teachers to introduce the questionnaire. It takes students with a basic reading level less than five minutes to complete and the results are available in real-time, which is extremely efficient.”

“Now that we have results that we can quantify, we can eliminate the guessing game of which students need what help. Pearson has made it possible for us to make informed decisions on how to support the social emotional needs of our students more quickly.”

– Chris Hetzel, Principal, Waunakee Intermediate School

Reporting tool improves district-wide understanding

Review360® is a web-based system that gives educators the training, recommendations, and decision-driving data they need to manage classroom behaviour and help their students succeed academically. The WCSD uses Review360 to gather, analyze, and report the data they need to address their students' behavioural health needs.

How could Review360's “sizzle” improve the behaviour and mental health in your school district? Explore your options at PearsonClinical.ca.

– Kristen Thompson, Psychologist, Waunakee Intermediate School



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