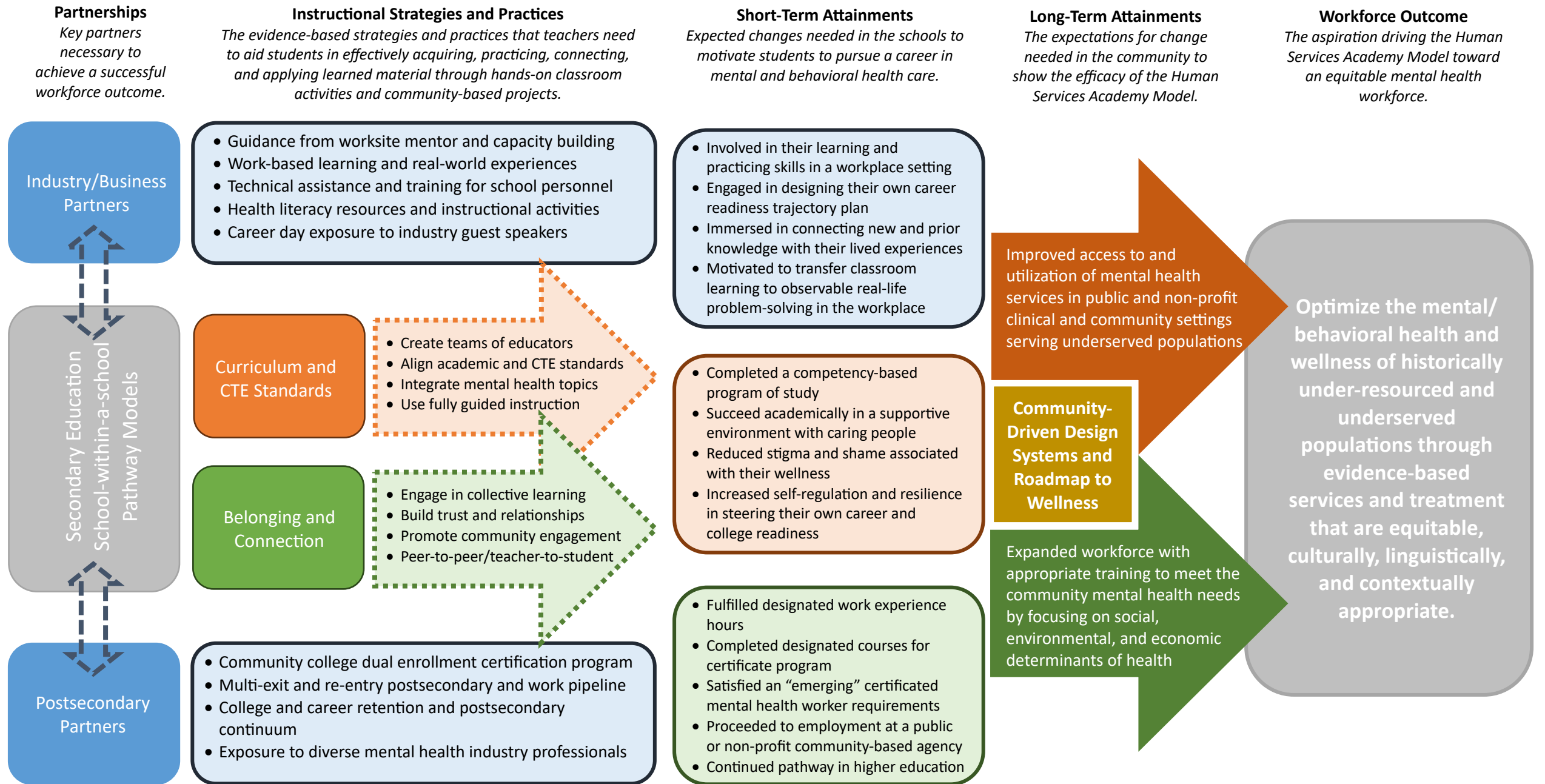


Human Services Academy Model for Advancing Mental Health Workforce Development



Partnerships

Partnerships that bring people with diverse expertise together—school personnel, educational and community leaders, mental health providers, consumers and community members—is the foundation to building an equitable and high-quality workforce. Simply put, communitywide partnerships are the infrastructure toward creating an equitable workforce that mirrors the diversity of communities and advances healthy communities. As the first key element of the Human Services Academy Model, these partners include:

Industry and Business partners. A strong collaboration with industry and employers works to balance a high school student’s education by combining the classroom instruction and fieldwork practicum for real-world experiences. When classroom learning and instruction is successfully applied in a workplace setting, and students can make a meaningful and purposeful connection that builds on their prior knowledge and lived experiences. That is, students may give value and relevance to newly acquired knowledge and skills that will ultimately start shaping their college and career trajectory. Here are examples of what industry/business partners may provide:

- Real-world workplace learning opportunities for students.
- Workplace mentors to support students in their personal and career development and create a workforce pool of potential workers.
- Opportunities for industry-based certifications toward entry-level employment.
- On-site training resources and state-of-the-art equipment and technology.
- Professional development training for teachers that aligns classroom learning and instruction with competencies required by the industry/business partner.

Secondary schools. School environments and educators are essential to youth development and acquiring the necessary knowledge to thrive in life. Schools are also safe spaces where students can foster supportive relationships with peers and caring adults. Schools are invested in advancing career and technical education (CTE) that allows students the opportunity to learn about emerging careers and build on hard and soft skills unique to a career pathway. The COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed school climates as safe spaces where students feel supported and have access to caring adults. The pandemic also reiterated the role that schools play in: (1) mobilizing youth leaders and community health advocates, and (2) developing or strengthening a seamless, coordinated, culturally and linguistically competent workforce pipeline. A secondary school partner can:

- Provide access to teachers and their curriculum with opportunities to align classroom instruction with industry/business workforce needs.
- Broker connections to students for industry/business to recruit a potential youth workforce with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.
- Leverage training, education and career opportunities for youth and their families interested in pursuing a career path in mental and behavioral health.
- Be a community-focused setting for industry/business partners to provide services and resources that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Lead educational programs that promote and expand prevention-focused services and reduce stigma associated with mental health.

Postsecondary schools. Community colleges are major partners in ensuring students’ smooth transition to postsecondary education and employment opportunities in

mental and behavioral health. Community health awareness and improvements are associated to economic development. A community colleges and industry/business partnership promote and expand CTE in middle and high schools to fast-track career opportunities in high-growth mental and behavioral health fields. A postsecondary community college partner may provide:

- Dual enrollment opportunities for high school students to earn college credit and a CTE certificate in mental health.
- Additional hands-on work experiences that expose students to new community and workplace settings that require them to examine challenges and opportunities from the lens of the population being served.
- A mechanism to collect and analyze data on student certificate program enrollment, retention, completion, and employment.
- A community-wide effort that includes a four-year university and county agencies to invigorate, expand, and enhance a workforce with advance degrees and

Partnership structure. The key to successful partnerships is trust and equitable relationships where each partner feel included and able to contribute toward advancing a collective effort that benefits all parties.

- Focus on youth and families; find out what they need.
- Recognize the role that each partner plays and the strengths that they bring to the partnership.
- Be inclusive of all partners, including youth and families, in the decision-making process.
- Have consistent partnership meetings to share challenges, opportunities, and successes. Ensure that everyone stays informed.
- Focus on capacity-building and youth development using a strength-based or asset-based approach.

Instructional Strategies and Practices

Translating classroom learning into real-world practice is an essential conduit for students to gain meaningful experiences, value their efforts toward attaining goals, and seek answers to questions like, “Can I succeed at this work-related task?” “Do I really want to do this task?” “Why should I do this task?” Additionally, adult connections (i.e., teachers, worksite mentors) play an important role in guiding students and expanding their learning beyond the classroom. Learning can also be facilitated using technology—digital libraries, online platforms, social media—that gives students instant access to a vast amount of information and resources. These technologies connect the classroom instruction and experience to real-world settings. As a form of work-based learning, technology provides students opportunities to connect with mental health experts not just locally, but from around the world.

Curriculum and standards alignment. A curriculum that is aligned to industry/business CTE standards means that students have access to a set of skills unique to that industry/business. An interdisciplinary team of stakeholders (i.e., educators, industry/business, students, parents) is necessary when making decisions about the alignment of curriculum and standards, and to ensure a high-quality curriculum and assessments. By aligning academic with CTE standards, it brings relevancy to classroom instruction and can result in strengthening the pipeline from high school to postsecondary and eventually employment. For the mental and behavioral health industry/business, it means bilingual and bicultural youth entering the mental and behavioral pipeline.

Sense of belonging and connectedness. Strong social networks and student-led school organizations can be an effective way to build a healthy school community that cultivates trust and relationships. When students feel a sense of community and supported by caring adults, collectively, they build the advocacy capacity of their peers that have felt excluded and marginalized. Being connected to a school community where peers and educators have shared values, can be a protective factor associated with mental wellbeing. It can also translate to community service and an “I can make a difference” attitude.

Multiple education, training, and CTE pathway. Expand and strengthen CTE programs via dual enrollment between the high school and community college with the opportunity for high school students to earn college credit, access relevant employment, and advance their career and economic progress. Create a high school to community college sequence of courses at the introductory, concentration and capstone levels, giving students skills to build on as they move toward their careers. To match course rigor, technical preparation and education, and use of relevant career practicum models at the high school and community college, this model focuses on multiple methods for course alignment. This includes engaging employers in conversation that aligns CTE standards with the mental and behavioral health needs. A framework of sequenced courses that will engage the students, ensure they are learning relevant skills for future employment as mental and behavioral health workers and encourage them to transition from secondary to postsecondary.

Short-Term Attainments

The short-term focus is on: (1) building a certified entry-level workforce that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to

address the immediate needs of underserved populations, and (2) encouraging students to continue their academic efforts at a four-year university while remaining in a mental and behavioral health career path. Build on youths lived/life experiences and resilience as strengths or assets in their career trajectory. Additionally, recognize and incentivize youth as community leaders and key change agents in reducing stigma and shame associated with mental health and advancing healthy communities.

Long-Term Attainments

A long-term aim is to developing comprehensive community-driven system of care that: (1) emphasize culture, language, lived experiences, (2) promote early detection, prevention and intervention, (3) reduce risk factors associated with mental health disorders, (4) build resiliency or protective factors at the societal, community, family and personal levels, and (5) is inclusive of underserved communities and other stakeholders in decision-making and in designing their community-driven systems of care. The question driving this aim is “What is most important to you and your community?”

Workforce Outcomes

We will know this high school to college to employment workforce pipeline model is successful when the seamless pipeline produces 50 full-time mental and behavioral health workers or its equivalent in 5 to 10 years per high school and college partnership. Also, the recruitment, education, training, hiring and retention of community health workers, promotoras/es already on the ground advocating for their communities. Another success will be the expansion and replication of this model reaching more underserved populations.