

ABSTRACT

The 2009 Catholic School Mental Health and Wellness Survey provided some of the first nationally representative estimates of mental health services and staffing in private schools (Frabutt, Clark, & Speech, 2010, 2011). The current project utilizes the qualitative portion of that data set to examine how Catholic school principals describe both their greatest needs and most successful practices in regard to serving children's mental health needs.

PROBLEM CONTEXT and RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The U.S. Catholic education sector operates over 7,000 schools and educates 2.1 million students (McDonald & Schultz, 2010). However, there is a paucity of available data concerning whether and to what extent students in Catholic schools receive mental health services and supports. Moreover, little is known about the views of school principals toward social/emotional development and mental health. As Adelman and Taylor (2011) recently noted, "Failure to address the principal's role related to student and learning supports reflects the widespread tendency to marginalize this essential component of school improvement" (p. 8). Thus, the primary research questions in this inquired centered on defining:

1. What are schools' greatest needs in regard to supporting students' socioemotional wellness and mental health?
2. What are faculty and staffs' greatest training and professional development needs in regard to supporting students' socioemotional wellness and mental health?
3. What do principals perceive as the most successful approach or strategy that their school has used to improve the mental health of students?

METHOD

Participants. Participants were a convenience sample of principals of 346 Catholic schools from twelve dioceses (i.e., districts) across the United States. The average enrollment of their schools was 300 students ($SD = 173$). In these schools, comprised of 22% minority students, 2.9% of students were limited English proficient or ELL (min-max: 0-100%); 4.1% had an IEP (min-max: 0-26%); and 14.4% students were eligible for free and reduced price lunch (min-max: 0-97%). School location was: 35% Suburban, 31% Urban but not Inner City, 25% Small Town or Rural, and 10% Inner City.

Procedure. Principals completed an e-mailed survey link to the Catholic School Mental Health and Wellness Survey, adapted from Foster et al.'s (2005) *Survey of the Characteristics and Funding of School Mental Health Services*.

Data Analysis. Verbatim responses from three open-ended survey items were downloaded into NVivo software to assist in a systematic, multi-stage qualitative analysis. Text segments were reviewed one at a time and categorized into open codes. Categories and meaning units emerged directly from the data. Categories were created until thematic saturation was achieved.

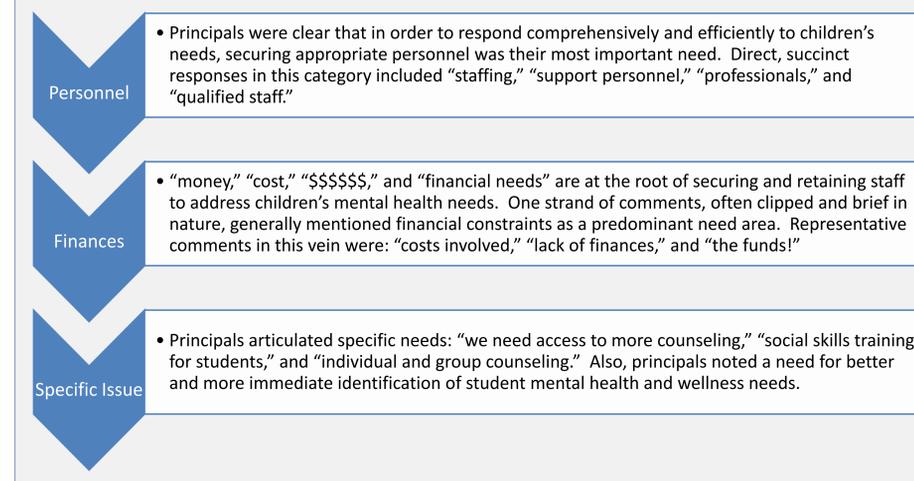
At right, the poster illustrates the major findings for each of the research questions, via brief descriptions and representative quotations.

FINDINGS

The line-by-line qualitative coding of principals' responses contributed to an overarching understanding of the primary research questions. Major thematic trends were derived for the three research questions, each corresponding to one of the open-ended survey items. Thus, boxes below present the emergent themes, elucidated via overarching descriptions, representative quotations, and frequency of relevant coded references.

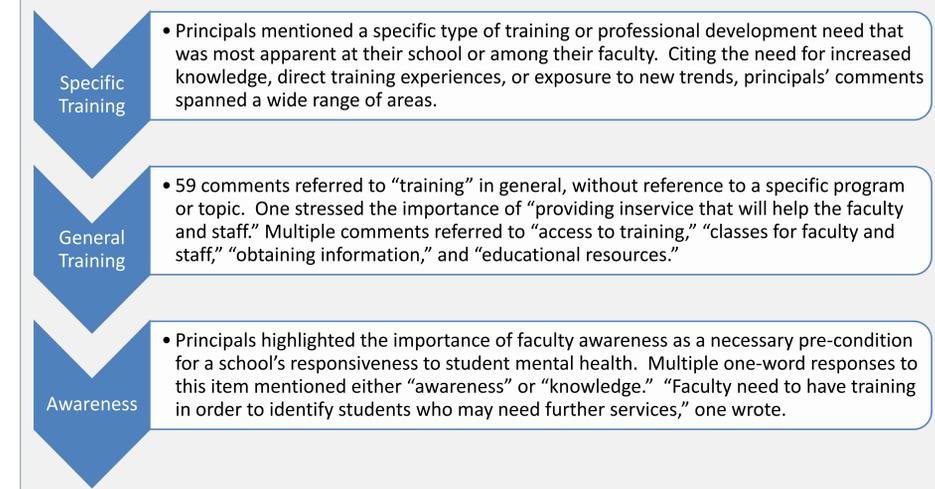
GREATEST NEEDS

Of 342 separately coded text segments dealing with principals' responses to this survey prompt, the three most prominent categories were Personnel (45%); Finances (23%); Specific Issue Area (17%).



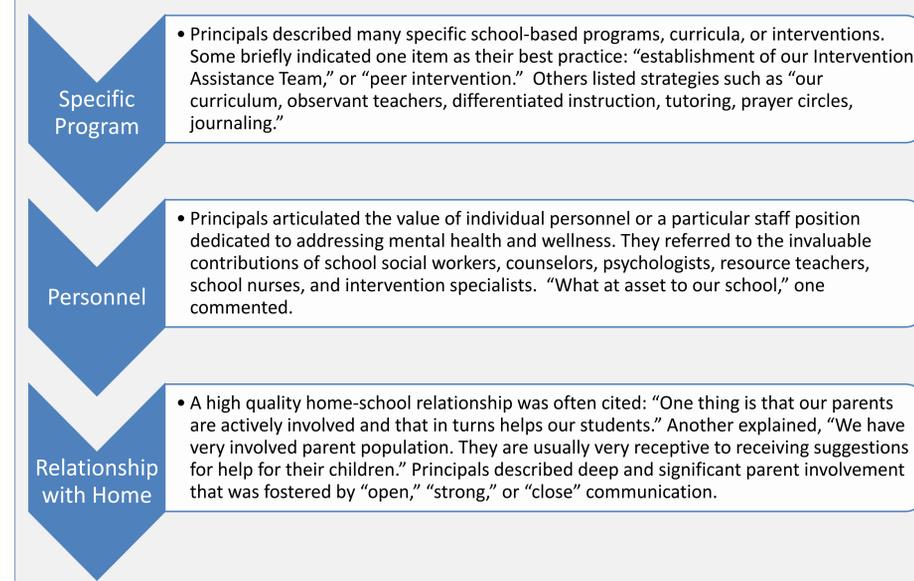
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There were 271 coded text segments regarding professional development needs. The most frequently mentioned thematic areas were Specific Training (34%); General Training (22%); Awareness/Identification of Mental Health Issues (12%).



SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES

Principals' responses in this domain yielded 306 text segments. The most frequently occurring themes were Specific Program or Curriculum (33%); Personnel (23%); Relationship with Home (14%).



REFERENCES

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