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**Bernalillo County
Behavioral Health
Initiative: Albuquerque
Public Schools Peer
Helper Program Process
Evaluation**

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Bernalillo County Behavioral Health
Initiative

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH
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Introduction

The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) reported 26 suicide deaths among New Mexico youth under 18 years of age for both 2019 and 2020. (DOH, 2021). Suicides accounted for an average of 29% of all deaths among 15-24 year-olds state-wide from 2014-2018 (LFC 2021), and among youth 10-17 years old, suicide was the second leading cause of injury leading to death in New Mexico (NM IBIS, 2020). New Mexico's Indicator-Based Information System (NM-IBIS) also noted differences across various demographics. In 2017 suicide attempts in grades 9-12 were about 1.5 times higher for girls compared to boys, although boys were 3 to 4 times more likely to die from suicide than girls. Suicide rates among American Indian students were higher than those of all other races. Reported suicide attempts were almost 4 times higher for students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual when compared to students who identified as straight. NM IBIS also noted that firearms were the leading cause of suicide death across all age groups except among those 10-14 years old for whom suffocation was the leading cause. (IBIS 2021).

From a public health perspective, these suicide¹ deaths are preventable. Viewing suicide as a public health problem moves the emphasis of prevention efforts beyond helping individuals who are expressing suicidality to including robust prevention education and identification of high suicide risk individuals *before* they attempt suicide. This perspective of suicidality promotes assessment, mitigation of risk factors, and increasing the number and strength of protective factors (CDC, undated).

In February 2015, the Bernalillo County Commission and voters approved a new, non-sun setting gross receipts tax of 1/8 cent to develop a unified and coordinated behavioral health system in the County to improve access to care throughout the region. This tax was expected to generate up \$17-20 million per year (CPI, 2015) and funds the Bernalillo County Behavioral Health Initiative (BHI). BHI is a collection of programs meant to ultimately improve behavioral health outcomes in the community. The Bernalillo County Department of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) managed the contracts and providers of the BHI-funded suicide prevention services at the time of this evaluation.

As part of the development of a business plan for a regional, cohesive system of behavioral health care, Community Partners, Inc. (CPI) assessed the behavioral health care delivery system for strengths and gaps in care. Although they noted the rising numbers of suicides in their 2015 report, they did not make a specific recommendation for suicide prevention. Instead, CPI indicated the need for a general crisis call center accessible to anyone in the community for non-emergency behavioral health calls, and a strategic prevention planning framework. The framework would “complement traditional, individual-focused programs and foster cohesive prevention/early intervention programming focused on early identification of problems and access to treatment, and education and empowerment of individuals, communities and systems” (CPI, 2015).

In March of 2019 Bernalillo County released a request for proposals (RFP # 32-19-NL) to “...provide Suicide Prevention Services for youth and adults who experience suicidal ideation or who are at risk for suicide in Bernalillo County. Services should also encompass the needs of family or community

¹ Suicidality encompasses thoughts of suicide (ideation), suicide plans, and non-fatal attempts. Suicide is a fatality resulting from self-harm.

members supporting individuals who are considering suicide” (Brown 2019, p. 3). The County indicated they intended to fund several programs with total costs not to exceed \$1,000,000.

In October of 2019 three new suicide prevention efforts began in Bernalillo County. First Nations Community HealthSource was funded to implement universal screening in their healthcare setting. Centro Sávilá started developing an on-call crisis line and plans to enhance their existing screening and treatment resources. (These programs were evaluated separately, see Murphy and Guerin, 2022). Albuquerque Public School (APS) began planning the implementation of peer-based suicide prevention programs in 21 schools to increase: suicide awareness, early detection of suicidality in students, and help-seeking opportunities for students.

APS proposed adapting the New Mexico Department of Health’s Office of School and Adolescent Health (OSAH) peer helper program for suicide prevention purposes. The resulting APS Peer Helper Program (PHP) was implemented in middle and high schools in which APS noted students exhibited the highest risk for suicide based on selected measures from the biennial 2017 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS).

The APS Peer Helper Program is a district-level initiative with centralized program administration and management, and 21 individual peer helper programs (PHPs), each tailored to the needs of the local school and led by an APS staff person known as a Sponsor. Table 1 lists the participating schools.

Table 1: APS Peer Helper Program Schools

Middle Schools (Grades 6-8)	High Schools (Grades 9-12)
Jackson	Albuquerque
Cleveland	Atrisco Heritage
Grant	Cibola
James Monroe	Del Norte
Jimmy Carter	Eldorado
John Adams	La Cueva
Kennedy	Manzano
McKinley	Rio Grande
Polk	Sandia
Taylor	Volcano Vista
Van Buren	

Our evaluation is a process evaluation that focuses on the implementation of the program. This evaluation synthesizes information from multiple data sources to better understand how the APS program was implemented, how the program worked, and how suicide prevention was addressed in the target population.

Brief Literature Review

Two resources that describe different approaches to comprehensive suicide prevention planning and implementation are presented here. *The Youth Suicide Prevention School-based Guide: Overview* (Lazer et al, 2012) is a collection of issue briefs that incorporate evidence-based approaches for 13 different aspects of suicide prevention including dissemination of current information about adolescent suicide,

school climate, administrative issues intervention strategies, pre- and postvention strategies, family partnerships, and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

More recent is the Centers for Disease Control *Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices* (Stone, et al, 2017). The technical package, “represents a select group of strategies based on the best available evidence to help communities and states sharpen their focus on prevention activities with the greatest potential to prevent suicide.” (p. 7) It presents seven strategies, each with a discussion of the rationale for its inclusion, different approaches to consider in implementation, potential outcomes, and the evidence supporting each strategy and approach. It is not a school-based or youth-centered package but the discussions of creating protective environments, promoting connectedness, teaching coping and problem-solving skills, and identifying and supporting people at risk apply to school settings.

Peer Models: General Best Practices

There are standards and best practices for peer-to-peer programs. In their “Why Peer Helping?” white paper, The National Association of Peer Program Professionals (NAPPP) discusses the consequences of poorly designed or mis-specified peer helper programs:

The field of peer helping has been maligned and peer helping interventions disparaged because many programs that have been investigated are peer helping programs in name only. These interventions do not adhere to the *National Association of Peer Program Professionals (NAPPP) Programmatic Standards and Ethics* (Bader et al., 2018); or the *National Association of Peer Program Professionals Rubric* (Berger, Black, & Routson, 2018). It is, therefore, no surprise that interventions that do not adhere to program development and operational standards jeopardize any possibility of being effective (Black, Tobler, & Sciacca, 1998). There should be no expectation that these interventions would meet process, outcome, and impact aims, mission, and goals and objectives of the intervention (Black, Tindall and Routson, nd, p. 1). *Full citations are included in References.*

The organization defines peer helping as, “...a variety of interpersonal helping behaviors assumed by trained students who undertake a helping role with others.... Peer Helping includes one-on-one helping relationships, group and discussion leadership, advisement, tutoring, service learning, leadership, conflict mediation, peer education, mentoring, staff outreach support, and all activities of an interpersonal human helping or assisting nature. Peer Helping implies the use of human capital that provides invaluable resources in the helping community.” (NAPPP, nd).

In descriptions of the PH trainings they offer, NAPPP has articulated an important distinction among types of peer helper functions. For instance, Peer Transitions Helpers (Peer Ambassadors and/or Peer Mentors) are, “additionally trained peer helpers who help peers new to the school by working with them about the logistics of the school, building relationships, reviewing student guidelines to help them fit in and support them through the first year, if needed.” At least two of the APS PHPs describe helping programs with this focus.

Programmatic Standards offers guidance for peer helper program start up, implementation, and program maintenance. Examples of implementation topics to consider and evaluate include staff and peer selection, required components in peer helper training, and service delivery. The rubric includes

assessment criteria that lead to advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic/does not meet standard designations; these encourage self-assessment by administration, staff, and peer helpers. They also offer a NAPPP Process Evaluation Questionnaire to help identify gaps and successes in program implementation.

NAPPP offers for a fee, peer helper training and credentialing based on a core curriculum for staff and peer helpers, with specific training available for peer tutors, career development mentors, ambassadors, and mediators. The resources mentioned above are free and can be found on their [website](#).

Stone, et al, (2017) define the goals of Peer Norm programs as, “seeking to normalize protective factors for suicide such as help-seeking, reaching out and talking to trusted adults, and promote peer connectedness. By leveraging the leadership qualities and social influence of peers, these approaches can be used to shift group-level beliefs and promote positive social and behavioral change. These approaches typically target youth and are delivered in school settings but can also be implemented in community settings.” The potential outcomes for these evidence-based programs include increases in health coping attitudes and behaviors, referrals for youth in distress, help-seeking behaviors and positive perceptions of adult support (Stone, et al, 2017). An example of a successful evidence-based suicide prevention social norm program is Sources of Strength.

Suicide Prevention

“Sources of Strength is the first suicide prevention program involving peer leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide at the school population level.” (Wyman et al, 2010).

Retrieved from: <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/sources-strength> (verbatim)

Sources of Strength, a universal suicide prevention program, is designed to build protective influences and reduce the likelihood that vulnerable youth will become suicidal. The program trains students as peer leaders and connects them with adult advisors at school and in the community. Advisors support the peer leaders in conducting well-defined messaging activities that aim to change peer group norms influencing coping practices and problem behaviors (e.g., self-harm, drug use, unhealthy sexual practices). The program is strength-based and promotes eight critical protective factors that are linked to overall psychological wellness and reduced suicide risk. Specifically, program activities aim to reduce the acceptability of suicide as a response to distress, increase the acceptability of seeking help, improve communication between youth and adults, and develop healthy coping attitudes among youth. The program is also designed to positively modify the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the peer leaders themselves.

Students are recruited through staff and student nominations to form a team of peer leaders, who are mentored by 2-5 adult advisors. Certified trainers provide the peer leaders and adult advisers with an initial 4-hour interactive training. Adult advisors facilitate peer leader meetings over 3-4 months to plan, design, and practice individual, classroom, and media messaging activities. The peer leaders have one-on-one conversations within their network of friends; develop posters and public service announcements with local faces and voices; give peer-to-peer presentations; and develop messages to be delivered via video, the Internet, or text messages. The program is often initiated as a 3- to 6-month project, but it is designed as a multiyear project with ongoing peer messaging and contacts growing over time. Adult advisors receive training and ongoing support.

The Sources of Strength curriculum was developed in 1998 and is a fee-based program. The program is evidence-based for improving attitudes about help seeking from adults, knowledge of adult help for youth, rejection of codes of silence and increasing referrals for distressed peers.

Stone, et al. (2017) describe gatekeeper training as, “designed to train teachers, coaches, clergy, emergency responders, primary and urgent care providers, and others in the community to identify people who may be at risk of suicide and to respond effectively, including facilitating treatment seeking and support services.” (Gatekeeper programs themselves are social-emotional learning programs for the people learning the coping and problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and help-seeking that will allow them to be effective gatekeepers. Some programs are evidence-based for improving resilience and reducing risk factors and behaviors associated with suicide and have the potential to reduce suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.)

Evaluations of gatekeeper programs commonly note increases in suicide literacy but no changes to suicidal behaviors. However, a multi-site evaluation of gatekeeper programs associated with the Garret Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Program (GLS) showed suicide rates and suicide attempts among youth (10 to 24 years old) were lower in counties with GLS programs than similar counties without GLS programs. Like many suicide prevention programs, the gatekeeper trainings in GLS always occurred in concert with other suicide prevention programs making it difficult to determine the effects of specific suicide prevention activities. (Goldston et al, 2010).

Natural Helper Program

The Natural Helper Program (NHP) was developed by the Comprehensive Health and Education Foundation in 1979. “The basic premise of peer-helping programs is that teens may not go to the school counselor until stress and sleeplessness have caused them to fall behind in schoolwork, yet they often confide in peers when they are just beginning to worry. Because of this tendency of teens to seek help first from peers, peer-helping programs encourage troubled adolescents to get help before their problems become severe or have serious consequences.” (Tanaka and Reid, 1997). The focus of the NHP is providing youth with skills to help their peers with their personal problems.

The following program description combines information from Tanaka and Reid, *Peer Helpers: Encouraging Kids to Confide* (1997), the Action to Prevent Suicide website, and materials written by the OSAH Natural Helper trainer. NH Program components include:

- An anonymous school-wide survey to identify students and adults who are already ‘helpers,’ nominated students are invited to join the program. According to Tanaka and Reid, “Staff at Natural Helpers credit much of the program’s success to the recruitment and retention strategies they use.” (1997)
- Multi-day training and a retreat for students to encourage bonding across diverse groups and gain skills in:
 - Mental health related information and resources available to them
 - Suicide prevention training
 - When to refer a peer to an adult
 - Mental health self-care
 - Employing coping mechanisms to aid reliance

- Recognizing warning signal within their peer
- Challenging negative norms and reinforcing positive norms within the school
- Ongoing meetings and training
- Service projects that promote the goals of the NHP
- Natural helpers reflecting and evaluating the program for personal growth and program improvement.

Study Design and Methodology

This process evaluation is a mixed methods design, using qualitative and quantitative data. Due to face-to-face research restrictions, stay-at-home orders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and conversations with the APS management team, we were unable to conduct certain research activities including observations of peer helper meetings and collection of data from students served by peer helpers. Observations of peer helper meetings and a survey of student's server by peer helpers would have provided additional information useful for describing the development and implementation of the program.

The lack of data on unique students served by Peer Helpers limited our ability to report the number of students served and trends, the services they received, and indications of suicide prevention in the target population. We report performance measure data provided to the County to broadly report the number of students served. This report focuses on the implementation of the PHPs and the perceptions of the PHs, Sponsors, and staff at participating schools regarding the program.

The UNM Main Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved our human subject study. The data provided by APS and Apex on Peer Helpers was de-identified and so did not involve human subjects. The IRB and the APS Research Review Board approved our survey of APS staff at participating schools.

The time frame for this process evaluation is October 2019 (program inception) through June 2021. The first COVID-19 cases in New Mexico were confirmed on March 11, 2020. Public schools were closed on March 16, and on March 23, 2020, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued a stay-at-home order for non-essential workers². On March 27 APS closed its campuses for the rest of the academic year. In June 2020 discussion began to reopen schools fully with COVID precautions in place or with a hybrid virtual/in-person model. In July 2020 APS released a 64-page reentry plan; the hybrid model was ongoing through much of Spring 2021. While the effects of the public health restrictions and service delivery challenges related to the pandemic are not yet fully understood, we consider these extraordinary challenges in our evaluation of the APS program.

Data Sources

Data was collected by three separate entities: APS, Apex Evaluation, and UNM ISR CARA and is discussed by entity.

² From: <https://www.krqe.com/health/coronavirus-resources/timeline-coronavirus-in-new-mexico/>

Apex Evaluation

Apex conducted pre-and post-peer helper surveys and by agreement with Apex, ISR received de-identified PH survey data for the APS schools only.

Apex also provided information from APS Sponsors who entered information into an Apex DataHub to record program level information throughout the year.

The OSAH peer helper process for semester reporting through Apex's Datahub was altered slightly for application with the APS PHP. There were sections for reporting: program details (e.g., school name and address, contact information for the sponsors); numbers of peer helpers and their basic demographic profiles; summaries of meetings, youth recruitment, trainings, monthly activities, and service learning project information for Fall and Spring semesters; the number and type of personal development and healthy relationship topics discussed, and feedback for APS and Apex. Data were entered by each sponsor or their designee and PDF reports by school were available for download by sponsors, the APS management team, and evaluators.

The APS management team noted there were several technical issues with the Apex Datahub. For example, APS Sponsors emailed the APS management team multiple times (at the mid-year reporting time and end-of-year reporting time) to notify of deleted data, data not being saved, and other issues.

The Datahub reporting form included about 100 text boxes for the entire year. While this qualitative data gave rich, nuanced depictions of some activities, it varied widely in terms of the amount of text and detail. Where some individuals wrote a paragraph in response to a prompt, others responses were a few words.

The surveys were conducted by Apex, using the same procedure used for the evaluation of the OSAH program. We reviewed the survey instrument and suggested a few changes, primarily so APS data would be comparable to the State's peer helper data.

The pre-survey was intended to be completed during the first or second PH meeting. The requirement was that all PHs at a given school had to complete the survey before the APS program manager released the first training to the PHs. Sponsors had access to a SurveyMonkey version. The survey was released to students via their Sponsor's Google Classroom as an assignment. The pre-test surveys were completed from about September 3, 2020, to March 10, 2021. Post-test surveys were collected from May 5, 2020, through May 24, 2021.

After data cleaning there were 403 surveys from 303 students. One hundred peer helpers took both surveys and accounted for 200 of the total surveys. Sixty students took the pre-survey and 43 completed the post-test. Paired t-tests were conducted with the 100 matched pre-post PHs to measure changes in opinions, perceptions of suicide and school climate, and reported behaviors. Demographics are presented based on the 303 students, other analyses from the surveys are presented for 403 surveys, 260 surveys from Fall 2020 program participants and 143 surveys from Spring 2021 program participants.

APS

APS collected program information through monthly reports submitted by local APS school program sponsors via a Google form. A Google Classroom was also available for each program and a central Google Classroom shared among all the program sponsors and administrators. The central Google

Classroom housed a collection of materials and resources and served as a means of communication between sponsors and the SP Coordinator. We were granted access to the central Google Classroom. We did not have access to the individual school level Google Classrooms. Access to the school level Google Classrooms may have provided additional process information about the school level programs. Program data were limited to the activities and levels of peer helper engagement noted in the sponsor's monthly reports and program coordinator posts to the Google Classroom site.

APS like all BHI service providers was required to submit monthly performance measures to the County. The measures collect counts of new and continuing clients, the number of screenings for suicide and social determinants of health, and other items. The narrative section asks the providers to report successes, learning outcomes, barriers, and quality improvement for the month. BHI provided APS performance measures to ISR CARA from October/November 2019 through May 2021.

We do not report performance measures in detail because they were not designed to be used for program evaluation, rather they are used by BHI staff to monitor program performance. The timing of the funding, staff recruitment, and COVID-19 meant there was no student engagement for most of the first program year (Y1). The majority of Y1 performance measures consisted of narratives documenting the initial implementation of the program. Additional data were reported in Y2 based on monthly reports submitted to the program manager from sponsors and aggregated for the BHI report; they are reviewed in the *Centralized Program Management and Oversight* section.

CARA

To understand the reach and impact of the PHP from the perspective of APS staff, we designed a survey that broadly explored job roles, knowledge and awareness of the APS PHP and its messages, participation in PHP suicide prevention events, and perceived effects of the program on students, other staff, and themselves. On average, surveys were completed in about 20 minutes. The survey was conducted online from April 21, 2021 – May 19, 2021 using Opinio, a UNM licensed secure web-based application. The survey was voluntary and confidential.

We had hoped to release the survey to all staff at the 21 schools, but APS PHP management team did not have an all-staff email list and the only practical method to distribute the survey was through each school's principal. APS contacted each principal and provided us a list of principals and emails by school; the survey link was shared to school staff at the time and method of the principal's choosing (e.g., through their regularly scheduled email to staff or as a specific notice). We sent recruitment emails and reminders to the principals for them to share with their staff. We do not know how the recruitment emails or reminders were distributed to the school staff. We collected data from 19 of the 21 schools resulting in 575 useable surveys for an average of 30 per school. The survey and results are presented later in the report.

An additional 138 staff began the survey. Roughly a third of those respondents did not enter any data, another third did not progress beyond question three, and the final third did not progress beyond question six, the first non-demographic question. There were three factors that might have affected participation. First, the survey, as noted earlier, was administered between April 21, 2021 and May 19, 2021. This was near the end of the school year which is the busiest time of the academic school year. The second was a glitch in survey translation across platforms (computer access or phone access to

Opinio) that lasted three days. The program would not let people enter data into a required field, halting their progress. We communicated with principals about the error and encouraged staff to try again, we do not know what effect this had (if any) in the number of respondents who answered question 3 but could not get to question 6. The third factor was meant to increase participation and completion rates: the offer to participate in a random drawing for \$25 Amazon gift cards upon completion of the survey.

The APS Peer Helper Program

The APS PHP is modeled after the New Mexico Department of Health's Office of School and Adolescent Health (OSAH) Youth Peer-to-Peer Helper program, which is modeled after the Natural Helpers Program and Sources of Strength suicide prevention program and incorporates the Peer Youth Development approach. APS adapted the OSHA model as described in their proposal as follows:

The APS Peer Helper Program will foster peer relationships and competency in social skills among high-risk middle and high school students. This Program will be implemented in 9 high schools and 12 middle schools. The Program provides training to students who have been identified as "listeners" by their peers and school staff. These trained helpers learn to respond effectively when their fellow students experience a wide range of difficulties, and they receive valuable coaching in connecting vulnerable peers to appropriate resources. In particular, this program will focus on training student leaders to be able to identify the signs and symptoms of suicide ideation in their peers and be able to respond appropriately (e.g., walk their friend to the school counselor, call the suicide hot line with their friend, etc.). In addition, the peer helpers will provide outreach to families and other community members to help them understand how to prevent suicide. To accomplish this APS will provide extended contracts for one staff member, in each participating school, to facilitate the APS Peer Helpers Program. (APS, 2019)

The structure for delivering content to the PHs and the APS community followed the OSAH model and included:

- Sponsor Training
- Biweekly Meetings (18)
- Peer Sponsors & Peer Helpers Retreat/Train the Trainer Retreat
- Monthly School Outreach Activities (9)
- 2 Service Learning Projects/Events (Must be student driven & focus on Suicide-Prevention)

The trainings, outreach activities, and service learning projects (SLPs) were intended to benefit participants and the school communities hosting the PHPs. APS also proposed outcomes of interest, which are listed below:

- Increase in the identification of students with suicidal ideation and behaviors in the target population
- Increase awareness of the Peer Helper Program
- Increased individual and student awareness of suicide and suicide prevention programs and strategies
- Improved awareness of behavioral health and community wellness.

APS Peer Helper Program Implementation

Infrastructure

The administrative infrastructure for the PHP includes a central administration and management structure with 21 separate school-based PHPs. The APS Office of School Climate (Student, Family, and Community Supports Division; OSC) was involved in the initial proposal, administers the contract, and oversees the fulltime Suicide Prevention Coordinator. Central management of the individual peer helper programs centered on providing content and support for the 21 school Sponsors and encouraging program reporting for contract compliance with BHI and the Datahub evaluation tools.

School Sites

Using the results of the 2017 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS), APS chose 21 schools with the highest percentages of students reporting suicide-related ideation or behaviors. Two middle schools and two high schools declined participation and one middle school and three high schools were added. Post-award recruitment resulted in 11 middle schools and 10 high schools. The participating schools are listed in Table 2 along with their locations (by APS Learning Zone³), and the number of students enrolled (2019-2020). Three of the five 2017 YRRS suicide-related questions were asked of middle and high school student, two questions were asked of only high school students. On average, about 53% of high school students at participating schools reported having felt sad or hopeless in the last year and about 3% indicated they had been injured in a suicide attempt. High school respondents reported considering suicide, planning suicide, or attempting at lower percentages than middle school respondents. Roughly 22% of all respondents said they had seriously considered suicide; 16% reported planning suicide, and 10% reported attempting suicide.

³[APS Learning Zones](#) are four groups of three high schools each with their feeder schools (middle and elementary schools).

Table 2: Selected Characteristics of APS PHP Participating Schools

			from NM YRRS: % of students answering they...				
School	Learning Zone	Number of Students	Felt sad or hopelessness	Seriously Considered Suicide	Planned Suicide	Attempted Suicide	Injured in Suicide Attempt
High Schools (Grades 9-12)							
Albuquerque	1	1,786	36.8	36.7	24.6	9.1	3.0
Manzano	1	1,457	41.0	20.2	16.8	9.9	5.9
Atrisco Heritage	2	2,313	36.8	20.7	15.8	11.4	5.1
Rio Grande	2	1,595	37.6	19.9	13.8	10.3	2.6
Cibola	3	1,896	37.0	11.1	11.5	11.1	3.0
Volcano Vista	3	2,227	36.4	19.1	14.9	14.3	4.5
Del Norte	4	1,059	41.0	12.7	15.4	8.0	1.2
Eldorado	4	1,779	24.5	17.7	15.0	6.4	2.1
La Cueva	4	1,800	26.0	11.1	11.5	4.7	2.0
Sandia	4	1,835	35.6	21.0	13.1	4.7	2.2
Middle Schools (Grades 6-8)							
Jackson	1	519	Question not asked of MS students.	22.0	13.8	8.5	Question not asked of MS students.
Kennedy	1	460		28.3	14.7	11.3	
Van Buren	1	533		26.7	21.5	13.8	
Jimmy Carter	2	817		25.1	15.4	10.4	
John Adams	2	531		28.5	18.7	9.8	
Polk	2	295		14.6	16.1	11.4	
James Monroe	3	1,030		25.9	17.0	8.1	
Taylor	3	342		28.3	20.2	13.0	
Cleveland	4	634		25.3	18.7	10.2	
Grant	4	461		24.3	16.2	10.2	
McKinley	4	484		24.7	11.8	10.6	

As reported in APS's proposal and updated to reflect participating schools,

Sponsor Recruitment

After gaining principal approval for their school to participate in the PHP, the OSC Director identified and recruited sponsors at each school. A couple of schools had 2 sponsors bringing the number of sponsors to 24. We do not know how sponsors were recruited, eligibility criteria, or have any demographic information to describe the sponsors. From the Datahub reports completed by a sponsor from each school, we know their APS staff positions which are reported in Table 3. The majority were Counselors.

Table 3: Sponsor Staff Type

Role	Count	Percent
Teacher	7	33.3
Counselor	14	66.7
	21	100.0

Program Management and Oversight

Administration and management of the PHPs was centralized with the APS' Office of School Climate. The Director of OSC was the primary liaison with BHI and other APS administrators, and the Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SP Coordinator) provided support for the 21 sponsors.

Sponsor Training

Sponsor training information comes from APS's reports to the County. According to performance measures, the APS team worked with NMDOH OSAH to design, plan and implement sponsor trainings. Originally scheduled to be an all-day, in-person training, trainings were moved on-line due to COVID-19 restrictions. To accommodate sponsor schedules, there were two virtual meetings for program overview and updates and "asynchronous and self-directed" trainings.

The sponsor training materials described the program:

The APS Peer Helper Program Guide is adapted from the NM Youth Peer to Peer Helper program (NM YP2PH) and the Natural Helper program. It is based on the premise that when young people have problems, they most often turn to friends for help, and within every school, an informal "helping network" exists. The program seeks to identify this informal network of youth who represent all the different subgroups, and provides training and support for those who are already serving as helpers. The guide is also based on the Positive Youth Development Approach (PYD), an asset based approach of working with youth & recognizing them as leaders of today.

This program provides youth with the tools and confidence to confront these issues with skills such as listening, problem solving, and referring their peers to appropriate adult resources. Ultimately, their training serves to enhance the helping skills they are already using with their friends. The youth in the program also recognize their own limits as helpers, and thus can be the link that is needed between young people and professional help. (APS 2018)

Prior to their involvement in the APS PHP teachers received background information on suicide prevention. The *Training and Professional Development* section of APS's suicide prevention protocols requires annual reminders for staff of the warning signs of suicide, pertinent Board of Education policies, and processes for dealing with potentially suicidal students. APS provides a mandatory online training to fulfill the requirement.

For their sponsor roles, they were asked to view at least one of four training videos, the Trevor Project, Erika's Lighthouse, Jason Foundation, or "I AM ME". The Trevor Project offers 24/7 crisis support, public education, and advocacy to decrease the prevalence of suicide among LGBTQ youth. Erika's Lighthouse promotes "inclusive school cultures around mental health" through classroom education, teen empowerment, family engagement, and school policy and staff supports for depression education

and suicide prevention.” I AM ME: Understanding the Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Identity is an educational training video about the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth and how others can be supportive allies. To varying degrees, each group offers resources and curricula in support of their programs as well as training.

Specific to program implementation, sponsors were asked to participate in several 1-2 hour training sessions between August and September 2020. Topics included:

- School Buy-in
- Introduction to Hybrid Peer Helpers/Team Building
- Recruitment and selection procedures
- School-wide survey
- Positive youth development (PYD)
- Suicide prevention
- Peer Helper Skills, and
- Projects (monthly and service learning).

As reported in the performance measures, all 24 sponsors completed preparation for their first PH meetings.

Administrative Support for Sponsors

Sponsors received an extended contract and a supply budget each semester from the OSC. The SP Coordinator provided suggestions for appropriate supplies and likely sources for procurement. Examples of supplies include cards for inspiring dialogue (e.g., Ubuntu or Chiji Cards), general supplies and training materials (e.g., marker, storage bins, sticky notes); and t-shirts or other merchandise (e.g., hats, pencils, stickers) from organizations like the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

At the outset of the program, the SP Coordinator provided suggestions for monthly outreach projects and service learning projects and included links to websites, videos, and the program’s collection of resources in their Goggle Classroom. The SP Coordinator annotated most entries with suggestions for implementation and provided this reminder for the service learning projects:

“As of Fall 2020, all Service Learning Projects will be virtual, due to the current health order. All Service Learning Projects should be led by your APS Peer Helpers, and be shared with parents/guardians/students, siblings/community members.”

Throughout the school year sponsors received additional suggestions and resources from the SP Coordinator. Communication between sponsors and the SP Coordinator was facilitated through a common Google Classroom and each program was encouraged to have their own PHP Google Classroom. The Coordinator posted assignments (due dates for monthly and semester end reporting; training reminders, etc.) and materials (i.e., training videos and ideas for navigating remote learning), as well as words of encouragement for the sponsors. Virtual office hours for sponsors were available both semesters. As discussed in the APS/ISR CARA meetings, these were often about moral support for implementing the program in the increasingly stressful virtual environment.

Sponsor Reporting to APS and BHI

As part of their introductory meetings in May 2020, sponsors were briefed on the program deliverables for the PHP. This included reporting monthly to the management team via a Google Form. Reported topics included progress toward recruitment and training goals, outreach and service learning project descriptions, the number of participating peers, and the estimated number of contacts made by peers. These reports were aggregated and reported as performance measures to BHI.

In October 2020 APS began reporting: the numbers of “trainings and students trained” by school and the number of sponsors. From October 2020 to May 2021 APS reported a total of 65 PH trainings, or an average of almost 3 trainings per school, attended by an average of 13 students. The number of schools reporting SP training exceeded the number of participating schools; it may be that some schools either repeated the APS PHP suicide-specific training or counted additional SP training beyond the program curriculum.

Meeting attendance was also tracked; the potential duplication of attendees in the counts makes this data less reliable. On average 149 PHs provided outreach each month. The numbers ranged from 117 in March 2021 to 187 in December 2020. Each school was required to conduct monthly outreach projects and on average 7 PHs participated in outreach per school per month.

The section “Suicide Prevention & Intervention” includes 6 measures, 2 of which are directly related to the PHP. In the reporting period there were two reported suicide referrals by PHs to a counselor, nurse, or social worker. The peer helper contacts reported monthly ranged from 3,988 to 10,261. APS defined a peer helper student contact as: student peer helper talks, texts, messages, or emails with a peer in need of and seeking support.

The APS PHP was funded in October 2019 with an anticipated program start date in January 2020. Based on the submitted narratives, contracts, and approvals (from the APS Board of Education and NM Public Education Department) were completed in early November 2019. Potential PH site schools were identified prior to APS’s funding application; they were notified, and the recruitment of sponsors began. Planning meetings with the peer helper program trainers at OSAH started in this time period as well. By the end of January 2020, 18 schools and sponsors were in place. By February 2020, the final list of 21 participating schools and sponsors was presented to BHI and the creation of extended contracts and allocations for program supplies commenced.

A program manager was hired in February 2020 with a mid-March start date, which coincided with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and APS school closures. In May 2020 the program coordinator met with all PHP sponsors who were encouraged to take one of the four recommended trainings: the Trevor Project, Erika’s Lighthouse, Jason Foundation, or the “I am me” video. During this time the status of return to physical classrooms was in flux, making it difficult to plan sponsor meetings, student recruitment, and student training.

We continue to face the harsh uncertainties of Covid-19 and the impacts that it will have on our school programs. We will learn more [from APS leadership] about the state of our schools and what the hybrid model will look like, but it has had tremendous impact on our ability to plan and keep sponsors committed to serving in this program. (APS performance reports, June-August 2020)

The narratives cite numerous examples of adaptations the program coordinator made to provide training, resources, and sponsors support virtually. The August 2020 narrative noted that 24 sponsors had completed an “asynchronous training” on program promotion/buy-in, the school-wide survey (for peer helper nominations), peer helper selection, and ideas for first meetings and projects. Sponsor retention issues result in several shared positions. In August 2020 19 of the 21 schools (90.4%) held their first peer helper meeting and the program manager started offering virtual office hours for sponsors.

The performance measures provided some insight into the difficulty of planning a student-based suicide prevention program in a remote learning environment, including modifications to sponsor and student training, limited opportunity for PH face-to-face interactions with other students, and myriad other changes because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

School Level Peer Helper Program Implementation

While there was centralized administration and management for the APS PHP, APS policies, and commonalities in sponsor and peer helper training, each of the PHPs was independent. Individual PHPs were subject to the local structures and policies set by their principals and the sponsors’ perceptions of local needs and appropriate roles for the peer helpers. Programs varied in peer recruitment strategies, meeting frequency and times, training and skill building, and monthly outreach and semester learning projects.

Choosing Peer Helpers

The OSAH peer helper model recommended a school-wide survey soliciting from students the names of students and staff, a PH selection process that considered factors beyond the student recommendations, and recruitment strategies for potential peer helpers and their parents. The goal was a diverse group of relatable and reliable students who worked well together.

This survey used by the OAHS P2P program was adapted for APS use by the SP Coordinator. The survey asked questions to help characterize the student population (demographics); identify what students thought the pressing problems were; and nominate students and adults as potential program participants. In addition to grade, gender and race, respondents were asked whether they had friends, adults in school or outside of school they can approach with problems and which one they would go to first. A list of 28 concerns a youth might experience were presented and the respondent was instructed to indicate the top five concerns for them and their friends at their school. Topics included abuse, depression/sadness, drugs and alcohol, family relationships, money issues, self-image, staff/student relationships, thoughts of suicide, etc. The last two questions asked respondents to nominate two students and two adults in the school, “who you believe are honest, trustworthy and caring. They should be youth/adults you would feel comfortable going to with a personal problem or who would show concern for fellow students and their community.”

Sponsors had different approaches to distributing the survey. Some sponsors targeted all students in their school (8), some chose to have it filled out in Advisory or a specific class (2), and some sponsors did not specify how the survey was distributed to students. Emails and Google documents were sent out, sometimes as part of a school-wide presentation about the PHP. There were informative announcements and emails targeting students, parents, and teachers and there was a robo-call to parents. Announcements were made in Advisory classes and information was posted on various internal school websites.

Table 4 is the number of distributed and returned surveys reported to the Datahub by the sponsors. The percentage of surveys returned is calculated from those data. Middle schools typically have smaller student populations than high schools (highlighted in gray) and the percent returned allows some comparison across schools. Sponsors reported almost 20,000 selection surveys distributed to students electronically. Two schools had over a 60% return rate; the highest return rate was for a school that distributed the smallest number of surveys (12). The lowest return rates were under 5%. The overall return rate was 26.3%

Table 4: Recruitment Surveys Distributed and Returned

Number of recruitment surveys		% returned
Distributed	Returned	
12	8	66.7%
485	312	64.3%
1,600	871	54.4%
1,600	750	46.9%
620	280	45.2%
350	134	38.3%
302	103	34.1%
300	91	30.3%
1,800	527	29.3%
412	100	24.3%
1,500	352	23.5%
900	200	22.2%
1,800	336	18.7%
2,245	360	16.0%
1,300	180	13.8%
530	45	8.5%
1,453	122	8.4%
2,000	152	7.6%
450	20	4.4%
274	10	3.6%
missing	287	na
19,933	5,240	26.3%

In addition to considering the most frequently nominated students as potential peer helpers, OSAH recommended choosing students with a natural affinity for helping and who were responsible, mature, social, able to recognize personal limits, capable of fulfilling a caregiver role, and anxious to fulfill an adult role (be a leader).

OSAH recommended soliciting input about students from colleagues and cautioned against students having access to the list of nominations. They also noted:

Many students could enjoy or benefit from participation in a peer helping program. However, programs thrive or fall apart based on member involvement, thus making the process of selecting those peer helpers for your program a crucial step towards its success.

Ideally, group members are selected by their peers, but it is the responsibility of the advisors to ultimately put together a group of students that will be effective helpers, work well together, and contribute to the goals of the program.” (OSHA NH trainer, nd)

Considerations for achieving a successful group of peer helpers included identifying and choosing youth who would benefit from participation, be good for the group, and have the time, commitment, and passion to serve. As to representativeness, OSAH suggested:

Youth who represent all the subgroups of your school on many levels: boys/girls; grade levels; social groups; cultural and ethnic groups, etc. You are not looking for a group who are already best friends, but youth who will bond across all this diversity. They will be the models for friendship, acceptance and understanding in your school. And, you will have helpers in all the different groups in your school to act as the eyes and ears over your entire school population watching for youth who need support and help. (OSHA training materials)

Sponsor reports from the Datahub provide some information on the PH selection process. Most sponsors compiled lists of potential peer helpers from the returned surveys based on the largest number of nominations. Some sponsors also asked for recommendations from teachers. Almost all the sponsors had advisory or selection committees of other teachers, counselors, or administrators to review the lists compiled from the surveys and other nominations; some enlisted all teachers in the review. One sponsor sent the list of nominations to department heads and asked each of them to choose [*a few*] students. At least one selection committee comprised staff identified by students in their surveys. In addition to student nominations, other criteria mentioned for determining who would be invited to be a peer helper included: to which activities and groups the students belonged, nominee grades, balance across grade levels, balance by unspecified diversity criteria, and nominees to whom teachers thought students would reach out. Not all sponsors used these criteria.

Potential peer helpers and their parents were contacted by email and telephone to invite them to participate in the PHP or to attend an informative presentation about the PHP. Some sponsors used the forms provided by OSAH and the APS management team. Parental permission was required for participation. Some students declined the invitation, and some parents did not fill out the required permission forms for invited students.

The 2020-2021 APS Peer Helpers

We were unable to calculate the unduplicated number of peer helpers who participated at each school over the course of the program and so we provide two estimates of the number of peer helpers, both of which are likely underestimates. The first estimate is 287, from sponsor-reported data (Datahub). Because students could withdraw and join over the course of the school year we expected some fluctuation in the number of PHs. The second estimate is more than 312, based on unique students who *started* the pre-post Apex survey. Because it is rare to have 100% participation in any survey, it is likely these respondents represent only a portion of all PHs.

Table 5: Estimated Distribution of Peer Helpers across Schools

School	Sponsor Reports		Started PH Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Albuquerque High School	6	2.1	8	2.6
Atrisco Heritage High School	18	6.3	20	6.4
Cibola High School	7	2.4	7	2.2
Cleveland Middle School	15	5.2	14	4.5
Del Norte High School	16	5.6	17	5.4
Eldorado High School	15	5.2	16	5.1
Grant Middle School	17	5.9	7	2.2
Jackson Middle School	12	4.2	15	4.8
James Monroe Middle School	20	7.0	19	6.1
Jimmy Carter Middle School	3	1.0	6	1.9
John Adams Middle School	8	2.8	4	1.3
Kennedy Middle School	13	4.5	16	5.1
La Cueva High School	22	7.7	42	13.5
Manzano High School	12	4.2	13	4.2
McKinley Middle School	12	4.2	12	3.8
Polk Middle School	13	4.5	15	4.8
Rio Grande High School	11	3.8	9	2.9
Sandia High School	33	11.5	40	12.8
Taylor Middle School	10	3.5	12	3.8
Van Buren Middle School	12	4.2	9	2.9
Volcano Vista High School	12	4.2	11	3.5
Total	287	100.0	312	100.0

Table 6 reports PH participation in the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 surveys by school.

Table 6: Number of PH surveys by School, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021

School	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Albuquerque High School	8	3.1	6	4.2
Atrisco Heritage High School	18	7.3	11	7.7
Cibola High School	7	2.7	3	2.1
Cleveland Middle School	11	4.2	3	2.1
Del Norte High School	14	5.3	7	4.9
Eldorado High School	10	3.8	7	4.9
Grant Middle School	5	1.9	1	0.7
Jackson Middle School	14	5.3	5	3.5
James Monroe Middle School	17	6.5	4	2.8
Jimmy Carter Middle School	5	2.3		
John Adams Middle School	3	1.1	2	1.4
Kennedy Middle School	13	5.0	10	7.0
La Cueva High School	21	8.0	39	27.3
Manzano High School	13	5.0	1	0.7
McKinley Middle School	10	3.8	1	0.7
Polk Middle School	14	5.3	12	8.4
Rio Grande High School	9	3.4		
Sandia High School	39	14.9	12	8.4
Taylor Middle School	11	4.2	6	4.2
Van Buren Middle School	8	3.1	4	2.8
Volcano Vista High School	1	2.3	9	6.3
Total	260	100.0	143	100

Tables 7 - 9 reports grade level, age, and gender from peer helper pre-post survey data.

Among middle school grade levels, most of the PHs were in 8th grade. Among high school PHs, 11th and 12th grades were the most represented grades. The mean age was 14.5 years old and the majority were female (68.9%).

Table 7: PH School Grade

	Count	Percent
6th	23	7.6
7th	40	13.2
8th	61	20.1
9th	34	11.2
10th	28	9.2
11th	60	19.8
12th	57	18.8
Total	305	100.0

Table 8: PH Age

Age	Count	Percent
11 or younger	17	5.6
12	36	11.9
13	58	19.1
14	35	11.6
15	35	11.6
16	54	17.8
17	52	17.2
18 or older	16	5.3
Total	303	100.0
Mean Age	14.5 years old	

Table 9: PH Gender

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	218	68.6
Male	84	27.7
Self-identify	11	3.6
Total	303	100.0

Race and ethnicity in the PH surveys were combined and did not distinguish between race and Hispanic identity (there were 372 responses for 303 PHs). Instead of the distribution of PHs across race or ethnic categories (totaling 100%), Table 10 presents *the percentage of peer helpers who identified with each race/ethnic category*. Over 50% of PHs identified as Hispanic, 42% identified as White. 9.2% Black, 10.5% Asian, and 5.2% of PHs identified as American Indian.

Table 10: Percentage of PHs Choosing Survey Race/Ethnicity Categories

Race/Ethnicity	Count	Percent of PHs
White/Caucasian	128	42.2
Black/African American	28	9.2
Hispanic/Latino	160	52.8
Asian/Native Hawaiian	31	10.2
American Indian/Alaskan Native	14	4.6
Other	9	3.0

Table 11 is the PH response to the post-survey question, “How well do PHs reflect different students in your school (think about race, ethnicity, cliques, other social groups)?” A large majority (83.3%) thought their programs did quite well or very well reflecting their school’s student population.

Table 11: PHs Reflect Student Body

	Count	Percent
Very well	48	33.6%
Quite well	71	49.7%
Somewhat well	21	14.7%
Not well at all	3	2.1%
Total	143	100.0%

From the sponsors' perspectives, when asked what was missing from the recruitment and selection process, ethnic diversity was the most frequent answer. The second most frequent response was satisfaction with the mix of peer helpers. Gender diversity (more male and transgender students) and students who typically keep to themselves (or who are introverted) were also mentioned frequently as missed populations. They also noted their desire to balance student groups more by grade level, reach students with gang affiliations, and engage those identified as special education students.

Two high schools had Peer-to-Peer programs during the prior school year (funded by OSAH) and were funded again for 2020-2021. From these two schools some PH survey respondents reported they had been PHs for two years or more. According to sponsors, the returning PHs played a role in reviewing the nominations from the selection survey.

Scheduling and Meeting Frequency

OSAH and APS sponsor training required a minimum of two meetings per month. The purpose of the meetings was to, "continue to infuse team bonding, fun activities, practicing helper skill, problem solving, support and self-care." (OSAH 2019) The meetings were to include aspects of planning and training suicide prevention related service learning activity topics, filling out reports and surveys, and debriefing what worked and did not work. Sponsors were encouraged to have a sign-in sheet to document attendance and meeting notes.

Sponsors reported details about their meetings to the Datahub. The majority of PHPs were scheduled to meet once per week with the most frequent meeting day being Tuesday. Four programs reported meeting twice weekly for a total of 25 meeting days for PHPs. The majority of PHPs (61.9%) were planned as 60-89 minute meetings.

Table 12: Meeting Days

	Count	Percent
Monday	4	16.0
Tuesday	8	32.0
Wednesday	6	24.0
Thursday	5	20.0
Friday	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 13: Length of Meetings in Minutes

	Count	Percent
20 to 29	1	4.8%
30 to 59	4	19.0%
60 to 89	13	61.9%
90 or longer	2	9.5%
	20	95.2%

Sponsors were also asked how many PH meetings they anticipated holding in Fall 2019 (Table 14). The majority of sponsors (57.1%) indicated their PHPs would meet 10 or more times. Because Datahub reporting happened at the end of Spring 2020, sponsors were not asked for their anticipated number of meetings for that semester. Instead, sponsors reported 331 PH meetings were held (Table 15) for the 2020-2021 school year which does not include April 2021 and May 2021 because Datahub data collection was due before the end of the academic year. Slightly more than a third of PHPs (38.1%) met fewer than 10 times over the course of two semesters.

Table 14: Number of Anticipated Peer Helper Meetings Fall 2019

	Count	Percent
Fewer than 8	2	9.5%
8 to 9	7	33.3%
10 to 11	8	38.1%
12 or more	4	19.0%
	21	100.0%

Table 15: Frequency of Peer Helper Meetings 2020-2021



	Count	Percent
Fewer than 3	2	9.5%
3 to 10	6	28.6%
11 to 17	2	9.5%
18-20	6	28.6%
Over 25	5	23.8%
	21	100.0%

Peer Helper Training

As presented in the APS Peer Helper Guide for Peer Sponsors, four training topics were required for the PH retreat: positive youth development, youth suicide prevention, peer helping skills and self-care, and team building.

Figure 2: Training Topics for APS PHP Retreat

Required Topic Areas for Retreat			
Positive Youth Development (PYD)	Youth Suicide Prevention	Peer Helping Skills & Self-Care	Team Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the PYD guiding principles and importance of the 40 developmental assets Recognize youth as leaders of today & the future Build peer to peer & youth-adult partnerships Promote healthy relationships Practice leadership in a safe & supportive environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the data and terms Know the risk/resiliency factors and warning signs (Myths & Facts) What can you do using the A.C.T. (Ask, Care & Take Action) Become familiar with youth suicide prevention resources available at a local, state & national level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize when help is needed Successful communication, including listening skills & problem solving Utilize the "6 Step Helping Skills" to assist peers Recognize when a situation is more serious & needs adult professional help Awareness of resources & ability to refer people to the appropriate helping source Importance of self-care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create Agreements Promote teamwork, communication and problem solving Create a bond by getting to know each other on a deeper level and building trust Recognize similarities with one another and not just differences Increase motivation and self confidence Use fun & interactive activities to learn Encourage creativity and positive reinforcement

[Click Here For Resources](#)

APS Peer Helper Guide for Peer Sponsors, 2019

Because all training was moved online, these topics were separated into modules to fit the schedule for PH meetings. OSAH trainers presented the topics and provided information and activity suggestions for the online modules, which provided some standardization in the curricula delivery despite the change in training venues.

The Datahub report asked sponsors to indicate whether they had completed specific trainings such as peer helper skills or suicide prevention. Table 16 presents the number of specific training topics covered in by semester and the number and percent of PHPs that covered the topic by semester. The majority of PHPs (76.2%) completed PYD in Fall 2020 and 66.7% covered suicide prevention. Self-care was the third most reported topic in Fall 2020 with 57.1% of PHPs, followed by team bonding (47.6%) and peer helper skills (47.6%). In Spring 2021 there were small increases in the number and percent of PHPs reporting training for suicide prevention, peer helping skills and self-care. Suicide prevention training was reported by 76.2% of PHPs. The number of PHPs reporting peer helping skills increased to 66.7% of PHPs. Team bonding trainings decreased slightly in the second semester.

Table 16: Types of Training PHPs Completed

Training Topic	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	Count	Percent of PHPs Completed	Count	Percent of PHPs Completed
Positive Youth Development	16	76.2%	14	66.7
Suicide Prevention	14	66.7%	16	76.2
Peer Helping Skills	10	47.6%	14	66.7
Team Bonding	10	47.6%	8	38.1
Self-Care	12	57.1%	14	66.7

Sponsors were also asked to briefly describe training topics in their Fall and Spring PHPs; the majority named the OSAH and APS training topics or resources reported in Table 16 above. LGBTQ issues and depression were additional topics reported by sponsors in the Fall. For Spring 2021, one program reported having finished all the OSAH and APS trainings in the previous semester and described their Spring 2021 tools and topics as, “Navigating national resources online, in-depth training on local resources, such as NM Connect, intimate partner violence and its effect on suicide and community building during times of crisis,” Another PHP watched the Kevin Hines story, “I jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge.”

The pre- and post-surveys asked peer helpers about training topics they attended each semester (Table 17). Because of the timing of the pre-survey, students were asked whether they had completed their online peer helper training, which was required before PYD training could be released to their PHP. However, to acquire baselines prior to any exposure to PHP training content, the pre-survey was to precede the online training. Almost 10% of PHs reported taking the PH online training before the survey. The likely explanation may be the 23 students who indicated 2019-2020 was their second or third year in the program. Nearly a quarter of PHs reported they did not know whether they had completed the training.

By the end of the year, over 80% of peer helpers reported receiving training on suicide prevention (89.5%) and peer helping skills (83.2%). Almost 80% of PHs reported self-care training (79%). Although 62.9% indicated training in youth leadership, 25.9% said they did not know if they had covered that topic. Those who said they had not received training ranged from 6.3% (suicide prevention and peer helping skills) to 11.2% for youth leadership.

Table 17: 2020-2021 Training Topics Reported by Peer Helpers

	Pre Only		Post Only							
	PH online		Suicide Prevention		Peer Helping		Youth Leadership		Self-care	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Yes	25	9.6	128	89.5	119	83.2	90	62.9	113	79.0
No	173	66.5	9	6.3	9	6.3	16	11.2	15	10.5
Don't know	62	23.8	6	4.2	15	10.5	37	25.9	15	10.5
Total	260	100.0	143	100.0	143	100.0	143	100.0	143	100.0

In the Fall 2019 sponsor report, all sponsors mentioned virtual meetings and the use of videos supplied by the Program Coordinator. Almost all sponsors indicated some form of group discussion as a delivery method. They reported using many of the tools offered by Google (classroom, meets, slides, Jamboard chat, breakout rooms, voice, etc.). One high school PH program mentioned using Google Jamboard (a digital interactive whiteboard), "...to establish group norms in our first training and have linked the norms into our Google Classroom." Other digital tools mentioned include ED puzzle, YouTube, and Kahoot. A high school sponsor described how the tools and training came together for their program:

[Through Google Classroom] We post videos/material via Slides that are linked to Ed Puzzle and Google Classroom. Students are given one week to watch the material. Ed Puzzle gives us a timestamp to indicate when each student has watched the material. We then meet to review highlights and discuss and interact as a team. We meet as a large group and also have interactive breakout activities. We also created an "Exit-Ticket" which is a Google Form that is used as a tool to provide support to our students if they need to process material, content, or concerns/emotions with a Co-Sponsor or Counselor.

Throughout Spring 2021, training meetings were predominantly on-line although a few were held in-person. Nearly all training was virtual and included videos and discussions as methods for content delivery. Handouts and worksheets were reported as training methods for one group. Another sponsor reported that all the APS and DOH [OSAH] trainings were completed in a one-day virtual retreat. Several new training partners were mentioned: additional school counselors, NM Connect staff, the Albuquerque Police Department, and Christopher Allers, an Albuquerque native and Santa Fe Public Schools staff member who presented the *I AM ME* training. Two sponsors did not report methods for their peer helper trainings.

As part of the Datahub reports for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, sponsors were asked to describe what worked in their trainings, what did not work, and what changes they would make based on those insights. Tables 18 and 19 summarize the responses for Fall and Spring semesters. Similar comments were combined and the number who mentioned the topic is included in parentheses. The quotes were lightly edited for brevity.

Table 18: Fall 2019 Sponsor Assessments of Peer Helper Training

What Worked	What Did Not Work	Planned Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings were engaging/interesting (9) • Videos and discussion afterwards. • Team bonding games • Time for student to ask questions • Everyone participated • A second round of recruiting • Small Groups/Breakout Groups • Meeting outside to include parents • Establishing a safe space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings were too long • Too many videos • On-line venue felt impersonal • Needed more interaction and activities. • Students reticent to participate • PH with cameras off • Time requirements for PHs to complete modules. • Team building challenging on-line • Attendance issues. • Difficulty adapting PYD training curriculum written for someone else. • Difficulty assessing level of understanding in virtual environment • Scheduling with PHs online was difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase interactivity • Provide materials in Spanish and English • Look for new engagement strategies to insure full participation. • Establish meeting time and ask students to work around it • Incentives for student participation • Meet in-person/face-to-face • Trainers who wrote material present it. • Do a full day training • Shorten training • Increase the number of meeting hours to get trainings done

A few sponsors went into more depth in their explanations of the adaptations they made during Fall 2020.

Opening the meeting with a game or get to know each other activity before each training put the students at ease and gave them a break from just having been on-line all day.”

I made the trainings a bit more interactive by stopping at certain points and having the students discuss and share ideas/experiences either verbally or written in the chat. This seemed to engage them more and lead to more bonding with each other.

Students feel more connected when we watch material ahead of time and have more time to discuss and connect during our meetings.

Table 19: Spring 2020 Sponsor Assessments of Peer Helper Training

What Worked	What Did Not Work	Planned Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings were engaging/interesting (5) • Creating a safe space with established group norms • Did trainings in Spanish and English • PH watch videos on their own time • Recruiting more students • Social interactions with peers • Day-long virtual training ‘field trip’ • Ericka’s Light House a favorite • Taking turns asking and answering questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHs tired of screen-based activities leading to low participation and engagement (15) • Difficult to support PHs in difficult conversations. • Difficult to be responsive to students’ unspoken needs. • Computer lags due to wifi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train in-person (9) • One day retreat to complete all training. (3) • Combine training with other PHPs in district; use breakout groups when appropriate. (2) • Shorter, more interactive lessons (2) • Incentives for students

Sponsor comments about the Spring 2021 trainings reflected the cumulative effects of nearly a full year of online school.

The kids were kind of burned out at the end of the day. This was like another core class of requirements.

Being virtual did not work well for the students especially when they were sharing and needed support. It is just not the same over the computer.

Not having training face to face makes it difficult to "read the students", for example, is it time to take a break, are they understanding the information, are they feeling uncomfortable, stress and anxiety levels, etc.

Monthly Projects

The APS PHPs were required to have one monthly outreach activities focused on suicide prevention. The OSAH P2P program required monthly health promotion actives focusing on one of their seven areas of health: physical/body, mental/thoughts/emotions, spiritual/soul, social/relational, and financial/money. APS narrowed the topic areas to be suicide prevention specific. Table 20 is a partial list of the recommendations the SP coordinator shared with sponsors.

Table 20: Recommended Monthly Outreach Projects.

Make short video introducing the APS peer helpers, you, & the program Share video on your school's website, announcements, daily email, social media, etc.
Reach out to your school's Yearbook/Newspaper. Ask if APS peer helpers can have a group photo for the club section of the yearbook. Have students write an article to accompany the photo and submit to the school newspaper/newsletter/announcements.
Ask to add an APS peer helpers section/tab to your school's website.
Social Media challenges like "21 Days of Kindness", "Self-Care", or "Kindness Initiatives"
Self-Care Bingo, create an online challenge, & contest
Erika's Lighthouse has tons of great activity ideas, including virtual ideas.
September is Suicide-Awareness Month. Many resources/activities can be found here. https://afsp.org/keepgoing
Participate in a Born This Way Foundation's pledge to #BeKind21 campaign
Participate in a 21 Days of Gratitude Challenge
NMDOH Helplines sticker, post/share/add to email signatures
Post/share Stress-Busters, create a Stress-Busters challenge
Social Media Campaigns from https://safeteen.net/issues/

Fall 2020

Several PHPs reported multiple outreach events for a total of 38 events, one reported no events or activities. General be kind/inspirational quotes/gratitude activities comprised 56.7% of the semester's events. Many of these were shared through social media and were part of promoting awareness of the PHPs. Specific to suicide prevention peer helping, eight events were described as presenting suicide awareness/prevention information or sharing crisis line resources; four made peers available for other students to contact (through lunch connections or a virtual peer-to-peer office hours).

Three programs mentioned internal training or activities as their outreach events. Other events/activities included a buddy mentorship program and supporting a drug abuse awareness campaign.

Like the PH trainings, sponsors offered their insights for what worked, did not work, and their planned changes to the monthly projects. Peer Helper buy-in and pride of accomplishment were common themes for aspects of the projects that worked. Sponsors also noted the virtual meeting world was challenging and PH participation was less than desired. Planned changes included increased familiarity with technology and general plans to increase participation from PHs, other students and teachers.

Table 24: Fall 2020 Sponsor Assessments Monthly Outreach Events/Activities

What Worked	What Did Not Work	Planned Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students producing content for other students • PHs feeling pride to see their work displayed/played/available to see. • PHs excited to make contributions to public media • Letting PHs vote on projects and activities. • Collaborations among PHs • Collaborations with other schools • Making things fun. • Students working on their own time as well as in meetings. • Spanish and English materials, • Using Instagram as a communications medium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of student participation (2) • PHs not wanting to turn on cameras • COVID safety practices on campus limited participation • Students needed more time for projects, • Learning curve for new communication and creation tools (4) • Virtual delivery w/o ability to follow up, • Outreach timing (vis a vis finals, etc.) • Too much for the sponsor to do for one activity • Office hours didn't work. • Managing student schedules online • Keeping group cohesion • Hard to track what everyone was doing • Not meeting in person • Not enough snacks at work sessions • Too many notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication • Have a back-up plan • Track activities by screenshot not # • Work out technical difficulties before [event] to increase participation • Getting peer helpers trained • Make PHs available at lunch • Increase social media followers • Increase PH and school participation • One-on-one sponsor-PH meetings, • Students pursue projects based on their interests, • Involve additional teachers

Spring 2021

Forty-two monthly outreach events were reported for Spring 2021. Three schools did not report outreach events. Nine suicide prevention-specific events were reported. Mental health awareness announcements were a monthly outreach event for one PHP. General positivity/kindness/gratitude events were reported by eight PHPs, one of which was for a children's hospital. Two sponsors reported PHs conducting mental health surveys, and using the information in different ways:

The [school] counselors collaborated with the Peer Helpers to offer assistance in fielding responses from students who took the survey. Student created, student led/implemented.

We all were able to come up with questions for our mental health survey and study the data from the results. We then collaborated with our film department and counseling department to make a video for our school.

An additional function of many of the outreach events was raising awareness of the PHP and/or the PHs; for two events this was the sole purpose. One sponsor reported an event that facilitated student/PH interactions. Other outreach topics included: allyship (2 LGBTQ-related, 1 race-related) and self-care

(4). Sponsors reported their PHP promoting other types of projecting including child abuse prevention, *Be Above the Influence* (drug abuse prevention), a blood drive, and two events promoted school-based health centers. Four monthly outreach events were described as helping younger or new students transition from their feeder schools. Three planning or internal PH meetings were listed as outreach events.

Forty-two outreach activities were reported for Spring 2020. The maximum number of activities reported by any PHP was five (2 PHPs; 9.5% of all PHPs); three PHPs (14.3%) had no activities. Eighteen (85.7%) PHPs reported at least one outreach activity for this time period, 23.8% of the 21 PHPs reported two activities, 19.0% had three activities, and 9.5% had four activities in Spring 2021. The total number of PHs involved and average number of PH per activity are presented in Table 25, as well as the reported number of total PH hours spent and average time per activity. Spring Activity 1 (SA1) included 156 PHs, or 8.7 PHs per activity. Sponsors reported a total of 79 hours spent on FA1, or about 4.4 hours per event. The total number of activity hours for Spring 2021 was 151 hours. The PH numbers cannot be aggregated, we do not know the numbers of unique and duplicated PHs for each activity.

Table 25: Spring 2021 Outreach Events/Activities and Peer Helper Participation

	Spring Activity 1	Spring Activity 2	Spring Activity 3	Spring Activity 4	Spring Activity 5
PHPs with projects	18	5	4	2	2
of 21 PHPs	85.7	23.8	19.0	9.5	9.5
Peer Helpers Participating	156	57	24	12	13
Avg. PH per activity	8.7	11.4	6	13	6.5
Length of Activity in Hours	79	45	15	7	5
Avg. per participating school	4.4	9	3.8	3.5	2.5

Three PHPs did not list outreach events for Spring 2021 and not all sponsors entered leadership information for their events. Youth led or youth/adult partnership events were 76.7% of all Spring 2021 events.

Table 27: Monthly Outreach Leadership Spring 2021

Who led project?	Count	Number
Youth led	12	40.0%
Youth adult partnership (co-producing)	11	36.7%
Adult led with youth input/feedback	7	23.3%
Adult led	0	0.0%
	30	100.0%

Like the PH trainings and Fall 2020 monthly events, sponsors offered their insights for what worked, what did not work, and what changes were planned for monthly projects. Easy and fun projects worked

well during this semester, as did projects led by peer helpers (especially with PH created content) and increased school-wide exposure/participation. Limited PH participation was an on-going issue. One sponsor summed up the shifting virtual/in-person school requirements they thought limited PH participation,

Again, very few peer helpers participated, as this semester was even more challenging with attendance. We went from virtual learning, to small group learning, to full in person learning. Changing schedules, split lunches, ban on after school in person activities made it very difficult to meet.”

There was less frustration with the technology associated with virtual meetings. This semester, sponsors noted problems with the structure and implementation of projects. Planned changes included increased familiarity with technology and general plans to increase participation from PHs, other students and teachers. Planned changes included creating strategies for eliciting PH commitment, providing more guidance for projects, reminders for PHs to help them meet deadlines, and testing/practicing virtual presentations and meetings.

Table 28: Spring 2020 Sponsor Assessments Projects and Outreach

Spring 2020 Sponsor Assessments Projects and Outreach		
What Worked	What Did Not Work	Planned Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When projects are easy and fun (8) • Student created content for students (3) • PH presentation of suicide prevention curricula. • PH leading projects (4) • Preparing something the whole school will see/experience (6) • When PHs collaborated in group and with others. (6) • Increased participation from students/school • Return to being in person • In outreach to feeder school, younger students seemed comfortable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of PH commitment and follow through on activities • Non-participation by PHs. • Lack of participation from other students. • Projects too unstructured. • No clear communication about deadlines, expectations • Tasks more challenging and time consuming than anticipated. • Inability to keep track of PH progress on their commitments. • No in person meetings • Awkwardness in blended virtual/in person meetings or outreach activities • Technology issues including connectivity, learning new programs and equipment. • COVID-related barriers for the upkeep for on-site activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more guidance and direction for PHs; communicate more effectively • Let students lead more often • Text/email meeting reminders and project deadlines to PHs. • Get firm commitments from PHs • Increase student participation in role playing videos. • Train sponsors and PHs on new apps/technology • Consider timing of activities for maximizing school involvement. • Increase advertising for PH and activities • Giving PH time to prepare and practice presentations. • Translate resources to other languages • Add hotline/resources to PH notes sent to others • Ask for additional staff support • Partner with other student organizations for projects

Semester Projects/Service Learning Activities

Service Learning Projects (SLPs) were defined for sponsors as, “Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Learn and Serve America National Service Learning Clearinghouse).” PHPs were to plan and conduct one SLP per semester. The SLPs were required to focus on suicide prevention, be led by peers, and be provided for an audience of students, parents, APS staff, and community members. Additionally, sponsors were to provide youth-friendly training on the chosen topics. Table 29 is a partial list of the recommendations the SP Coordinator shared with sponsors.

Table 29: Recommended Service Learning Projects.

Create a suicide-prevention/warning-signs/helping skills trivia game using https://nearpod.com/ , then host a game night online, led by peer helpers
Virtual/Online film/video screening with post-discussion led by APS peer helpers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I Am Me documentary (guide available)• More Than Sad from AFSP Documentary Mental Health (have an after-party)
Online Breaking the Silence Presentation with post-discussion led by APS peer helpers
Erika’s Lighthouse, Resources, Parent Education and Engagement, online event & led by peer helpers
Online Kahoot Game (suicide-prevention) with post-discussion led by APS peer helpers:
Suicide Prevention Walk/Run/Jump/Play (individuals participate on their own, then connect virtually. You don’t have to add a fundraising element/component. The walk can be for self-care, health, and to raise awareness.)
Online Virtual Resource Fair, add your own slides to the AFSP current Virtual Resource Fair.
Online Art Contest/Poster Contest/Art Show
Pop-Up Mural on Campus, share digital photos and videos online

It appears there was some confusion about the difference between the monthly outreach activities and the once-per-semester service learning projects. The Datahub reporting form included fields for number of PHs trained for the event, number of PHs participating in the actual event, and estimates of the numbers of APS staff, parents, and other participating students. It also included the same sponsor assessments questions used for training and monthly outreach activities. Given the overlap in reporting and confusion between monthly outreach and service learning projects, they are not reported. Information in this section is limited characterizing the programs based on the criteria above and brief descriptions of selected projects.

Fall 2020

Sixteen PHPs (76.2%) reported service learning projects for Fall 2020. , SLPs were reported for every month of the semester, although 87.5% of projects occurred in December. The majority of the service learning projects (52.4%) were accounted for in the monthly outreach activities.

Five PHPs cited SPLs different from their monthly activities and it was not clear that all the projects met the suicide prevention-specific requirement of the SLPs. One PHP adapted an American Foundation for Suicide prevention presentation for school-wide viewing; another collaborated with Breaking the

Silence NM to present their *Talking Mental Health* curriculum, which encourages discussions about mental health, removing “the shame, silence, and secrecy surrounding mental illness.” In conjunction with National Suicide Prevention Month (September), a PHP reported conducting a month-long social media campaign focused on suicide prevention based on the five elements of #BeThe1To [save a life] campaign. Other SLPs included the redesigning a garden space for "de-stressing," featuring painted rocks with inspirational words and quotes; and placing inspiring and positive messages on 1,200 luminarias for a Christmas school event.

Spring 2020

PHPs in seventeen schools (81.0%) reported SLPs in Spring 2022 and four schools (19.0%) did not report SLPs in Spring 2022. The confusion about the difference between the monthly outreach activities and service learning projects persisted: some sponsors appeared to have summarized the semester’s activities rather than discuss a project. The number of SLPs accounted for previously in the monthly activities decreased to 7 (33.3%). Two PHPs reported the same program as the Fall SLP (9.5%), and 3 appeared to be peer helper only (14.3%) programs. Of the remaining 5 Spring SLPs (23.8%), 4 of 5 programs had a suicide prevention component. Spring SLPs included formal training with a suicide prevention element, a town hall featuring the “I AM ME” video and training, a training on the NM Crisis Line, and the creation of a crisis resource card.

Optional Website Project

Website projects were a requirement of the OSAH peer helper model and were optional for the APS PHPs. Three sponsors reported a website project for the 2020-2021 school year. Promotion of the PHP websites were through Instagram, morning announcements, emails, discussions with counselors, and at presentations. Although sponsors were frustrated by unanticipated time commitments and a small numbers of visitors, they reported their PHs enjoyed learning new skills and the creativity associated with the process. One sponsor mentioned software that allowed co-editing as working well and another felt the software they used had limited creative choices. Sponsors acknowledged the steep learning curve encountered this year would make next year’s project easier and they would work to let potential users know more about how to use the resource.

End of Year Celebration

Ten sponsors reported year-end celebrations for their PHPs. Due to the reporting deadlines, two PHPs had not held their celebrations and instead described their intended activities. Food was a component in 50% of the celebrations; goodie/gift bags and certificates were part of 70% of these celebrations. Several sponsors handed out t-shirts to PHs. Some sponsors reported discussions about program accomplishments and pros and cons. About 50% of celebrations were collaborations between sponsors and PHs; 30% were PH led and 20% were adult led.

The timing and location of the celebrations were important for engaging seniors. One sponsor also noted it was easy to have goodie bags and hand them out without a gathering. Another PHP created a suicide prevention resource to give out in the last days of school. Challenges mentioned were the continued lack of PH attendance and student fatigue with virtual programs. For next year, sponsors said they would consider celebrating earlier and in person so seniors could be more involved, holding the gathering during school hours, and acknowledging PHs in an assembly. One sponsor’s comments summarized why they had the celebration, “The purpose of this celebration is to show our appreciation for all of the

peer helpers work and perseverance during a very different school year. I am very proud of what they accomplished given the various constraints they had.”

Personal Development and Relationship Issues Addressed

At the end of each semester sponsors were asked about the areas of personal development they felt they had covered. For Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, Table 30 presents four types of personal development with the number of PHPs reported to have covered it and as a percentage of the 21 PHPs. The top two developmental areas for both semesters were mental/emotional (81% Fall and Spring) and social/relational (76.2% Fall; 81% Spring). Fewer than 50% of PHPs addressed education and learning or physical/body topics during the school year.

Table 30: What areas of personal development were addressed this semester?

Personal Development Topics	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	# of PHPs	% of 21 PHs	# of PHPs	% of 21 PHs
Mental/emotional	17	81.0	17	81.0
Social/relational	16	76.2	17	81.0
Education and learning	10	47.6	8	38.1
Physical/body	7	33.3	9	42.9

Sponsors were also asked about types of healthy relationships they covered during the school year. Youth/peer to peer relationships were covered by over 85% of PHPs both semesters. From Fall 2020 to Spring 2021, the number of PHPs addressing Community, teacher/school and romantic relationships increase and the PHPs addressing parent/guardian/family relationships decreased.

Table 31: What types of health relationships were addressed?

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	# of PHPs	% of 21 PHs	# of PHPs	% of 21 PHs
Youth/peer to peer	19	90.5%	18	85.7%
Parent/guardian/family	12	57.1%	8	38.1%
Community	10	47.6%	13	61.9%
Teacher/School	8	38.1%	11	52.4%
Romantic	0	0.0%	2	9.5%

Sponsor Feedback for APS and Apex

Fourteen sponsors offered feedback for APS in the end of the school year Datahub report. The majority mentioned the challenging circumstance imposed in response to the pandemic and that they were looking forward to in-person trainings. Sponsors also mentioned the desire for a district-wide PH training, a monthly sponsors meeting for collaboration and idea sharing, training to be a better sponsor, and several thanked the APS management team for their commitment, program advocacy and support.

Specific to APS administrative support, sponsors commented:

...streamline data collection so that sponsors aren't spending so much time documenting everything multiple times.

Revamp your methods and requirements for disbursing funds from the grant. Your process is confusing, cumbersome, frustrating, and overly limiting. Because of the nature of the program, the APS approved vendor list is not very helpful either.

When working with youth, you need to realize that one of the biggest expenses we have in this program is food. Students need snacks during meetings, works sessions, and trainings. Peer Helper sponsors do not have the money to pick up the slack, nor does the program have the time for fundraising to buy food. [We] will be spending over 100 dollars for food for our end of year celebration alone. This is wrong.

It would be helpful to have had the due date for the spring report more towards the last day of school. We had the end-of-year celebration and the [activity] scheduled later to ensure more Peer Helpers could be a part of the activities.

Peer Helper Perspectives about their Programs

The Apex post-survey asked peer helpers a series of questions about their experiences and what improvements they might like to see in the future. As a final measure of program success, peer helpers were asked whether they planned on being in the program for the next school year. Of the 143 post-surveys submitted, 128 PHs completed these program evaluation questions.

To assess peer helper perceptions of their agency in certain aspects of in their program, PHs were asked to respond to a series of statements indicating whether it was not at all true, a little true, pretty much true, or very much true for them. The majority of peer helpers indicated they believed it was ‘very much true’ that they felt emotionally safe, were able to voice their opinions, and sponsor and peer helpers treated one another with respect. There was more agreement among PHs on the question of mutual respect than on whether they felt safe or able to voice their opinions. About 10% of PHs said it was not at all true or a little true the felt safe or felt able to voice their opinions. Less than 3% of PHs believed it was not at all or a little true that sponsors and PHs treated one another with respect. Why a small number and percent of PHs felt this way deserves further study.

Table 32: PH Perceptions of their PHP

In this Peer Helper program how true for you is the statement...”						
	I feel emotionally safe.		I am able to voice my opinions		sponsors and peer helpers treat each other with respect	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Not true at all	2	1.6	4	3.1	1	0.8
A little true	12	9.4	9	7.0	2	1.6
Pretty much true	35	27.3	41	32.0	22	17.2
Very much true	79	61.7	74	57.8	103	80.5
Total	128	100.0	128	100.0	128	100.0

Peer helper designed and led projects were among the reasons monthly outreach projects worked, according to sponsors. PHs were asked to respond to a scale to assess aspects of their program. In choosing and planning activities majorities of PHs said it was pretty much or very much true for them (60.9% and 57.8% respectively). About 44.5% said the same for leading activities. Almost 30% of PHs said it was not at all true or a little true that they did things that made a difference while 71.9% said it was pretty much or very much true for them.

Table 33: PH Perceptions of the Program

In this Peer Helper program how true for you is the statement:								
	I help choose activities		I help plan activities		I lead activities		I do things that make a difference	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Not true at all	12	9.4	11	8.6	34	26.6	13	10.2
A little true	38	29.7	43	33.6	37	28.9	23	18.0
Pretty much true	42	32.8	37	28.9	32	25.0	44	34.4
Very much true	36	28.1	37	28.9	25	19.5	48	37.5
Total	128	100.0	128	100.0	128	100.0	128	100.0

PHs were asked to list the things they would do to improve their PHP. About 11% of respondents said they did not know and 15% of respondent say there were no improvements necessary. The three most common responses were: raise awareness of the program among students, increase the number of peer helpers, and more PH events/outreach activities. Other suggestions included: meeting more often and face-to-face, more teachers, better/more age appropriate suicide prevention training, more activities including the whole school, coordination with PHPs in other schools, and better preparation for outreach activities. There were a few comments about group dynamics including increasing diversity, changing how peers are nominated to avoid recruiting only the popular people, and about wanting some of the PHs in their programs to be more actively engaged.

Increasing student awareness of PHPs at their schools was a concern of sponsors and peer helpers and is reported in Table 34. The Spring 2021 Apex survey asked peer helpers “About how many students in your school know about the Peer Helper Program?” Roughly a third of PHs indicated more than half (34.3%); about half (35.7%), and less than half (30.1%) of the students in their school as knowledgeable about their PHPs.

Table 34: Peer Estimates of Student Awareness of PHP

How many students in your school know about the Peer Helper Program	Count	Percent
Almost all	18	12.6
More than half	31	21.7
About half	51	35.7
Less than half	29	20.3
Very few	14	9.8
Total	143	100.0

In addition to program improvements, PHs were asked to list three things their sponsors did well. Most common responses were asking questions, listening (provided a support system), being there for them, communication, being kind and respectful, coming up with good ideas/facilitating PHs' ideas, making them feel safe/comfortable/a part of something, and good organization and planning.

Table 35 reports on the question: "Do you plan to be a peer helper next year?" Not all students were eligible for their current PHPs in the following year, 18 students mentioned graduating or moving. Of those not graduating or moving, about 80% planned to be peer helpers next year, 14% said maybe, and 6% said no.

Table 35: Participation in PHPs Next Year

	Count	Percent
Yes	82	80.4
No	3	5.9
Maybe	14	13.7
Total	102	100.0

Impact on APS Peer Helpers and APS Staff

The APS SP PHP aspired to promote more trusting student-staff relationships, increase help-seeking in the student population, increase awareness of the signs of suicide, and encourage and empower students and staff to intervene with students who were having thoughts of suicide. Data from the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 surveys of peer helpers and the April/May 2021 survey of APS staff are presented in this section to give us insight into some of those issues. There are no data available to assess the impact of the PHPs on the students who were the targets of the peer helper intervention interactions, monthly activities and service learning projects.

Peer Helper Knowledge, Perceptions, and Intended Behavior

Projected short-term outcomes for the APS Peer Helpers were changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. As noted earlier, for the 100 students who responded to both the pre- and post-tests, paired t-tests did not show statistically significant changes in knowledge, attitudes or intended behaviors. The tables in this section show responses from the PH cohorts of Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 for 403 surveys.

Resource Awareness and Access

Both Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 PH surveys asked about resources they could use to address personal problems. Roughly three quarters of PHs in both semesters either agreed or strongly agreed they knew what online resources were available to them. In Fall 2020, 84.4% of PHs agreed or strongly agreed they knew who to go to for help, as did 78.9% of PHs in Spring 2021. In both semesters approximately 8% disagreed that they knew where to go for help with personal problems in their school. While a small percent some attention should be paid to this finding. The 15.0% who neither agreed nor disagreed might reflect an acknowledgement of *how well* they felt they knew the resources; there are no questions to address *how* knowledgeable PHs were with the school's online resources.

Table 36: Accessing Resources for Personal Problems

I know...to get the help I need with personal problems	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
The online school resources	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	74	28.9	46	36.2
Agree	118	46.1	48	37.8
Neither agree nor disagree	40	15.6	19	15.0
Disagree	20	7.8	9	7.1
Disagree Strongly	4	1.6	5	3.9
Total	256	100.0	127	100.0
Who to go in my school				
Strongly Agree	89	34.6	58	41.1
Agree	128	49.8	52	36.9
Neither agree nor disagree	20	7.8	19	13.5
Disagree	16	6.2	10	7.1
Disagree Strongly	4	1.6	2	1.4
Total	257	100.0	141	100.0

Opinions about Mental Health and Suicide

Most of the survey questions from the pre- and post- PH surveys were designed to address topics OSAH expected to be delivered as part of their PH training, meetings, or other activities. To address these two topics OSAH created two trainings for APS: Positive Youth Development (PYD) and the other was Suicide Prevention (SP).

Majorities of peer helpers in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 (92.7% and 96.9% respectively) disagreed or disagreed strongly with leaving a suicidal teen alone if they did not want help. As to whether people who are depressed are more likely to attempt suicide, majorities agreed or strongly agreed in both time periods, 70.4% in Fall 2020 and 83.5% in Spring 2021. Almost a quarter of PHs in the Fall 2020 group and 10.1% in Spring 2021 neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. When asked their level of agreement with reducing suicide risk by reducing access to lethal means such as firearms, 50.4% of PHs in Fall 2020 either agreed or strongly agreed, as did 59% of PHs in Spring 2021. The percentage of peer helpers who neither agreed nor disagreed was 29.6% in the Fall and 24.5% in the Spring. Asked about their agreement with the idea that the great majority of people who commit suicide have mental health issues, 60.1% of Fall 2020 PHs agreed or strongly agreed, as did 69.1% in Spring 2021. Again, between a third and a quarter of PHs neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 37: Peer Helper Perceptions of Mental Health and Suicide

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
A suicidal teen should be left alone if they don't want help.				
Strongly Agree	6	2.3	2	1.0
Agree	13	5.0	4	2.1
Disagree	109	42.1	109	56.8
Disagree Strongly	131	50.6	77	40.1
Total	259	100.0	192	100.0
People who are depressed are more likely to attempt suicide.				
Strongly Agree	64	24.6	42	30.2
Agree	119	45.8	74	53.2
Neither agree nor disagree	63	24.2	14	10.1
Disagree	10	3.8	4	2.9
Disagree Strongly	4	1.5	5	3.6
Total	260	100.0	139	100.0
Reducing access to firearms and other lethal weapons reduces risk of suicide				
Strongly Agree	38	14.6	38	27.3
Agree	93	35.8	44	31.7
Neither agree nor disagree	77	29.6	34	24.5
Disagree	44	16.9	17	12.2
Disagree Strongly	8	3.1	6	4.3
Total	260	100.0	139	100.0
The great majority of people who commit suicide have mental health issues.				
Strongly Agree	44	17.1	32	23.0
Agree	111	43.0	64	46.0
Neither agree nor disagree	73	28.3	32	23.0
Disagree	26	10.1	5	3.6
Disagree Strongly	4	1.6	6	4.3
Total	258	100.0	139	100.0

Intervention Intention

Peer helpers were given three statements about circumstances under which they might intervene on behalf of a suicidal friend or peer and asked to indicate their levels of agreement with the associated statements. Over 90% of peer helpers in each time period agreed or strongly agreed they would ask a friend or peer if they were considering suicide and they would tell a trusted adult if they knew a friend or peer was suicidal. If their suicidal friend or peer asked them to keep their suicidal thoughts a secret, over 80% of PHs in both semesters indicated they would not keep the secret.

Table 38: Intervention Scenarios

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
If I were concerned, I would ask a friend or peer if they were thinking about suicide	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	105	40.5	64	46.4
Agree	135	52.1	68	49.3
Disagree	14	5.4	3	2.2
Disagree Strongly	5	1.9	3	2.2
Total	259	100.0	138	100.0
If a friend or peer asked me to keep their thoughts about suicide a secret, I would do as they ask and not tell.				
Strongly Agree	15	5.9	6	3.3
Agree	32	12.2	16	11.6
Disagree	125	48.8	65	47.1
Disagree Strongly	84	32.8	51	37.0
Total	256	100.0	138	100.0
I would tell an adult I trusted if I knew that a friend or peer was suicidal.				
Strongly Agree	125	48.3	82	59.4
Agree	119	45.9	47	34.1
Disagree	11	4.2	4	2.9
Disagree Strongly	4	1.5	5	3.6
Total	259	100.0	138	100.0

PH Self-Reported Peer to Peer Engagement

The performance measures reported to BHI defined ‘peer contacts’ as a one-on-one conversation, email, text, message on social media, subscribers/followers on Peer Helper social media account(s), direct message on social media, an online conversation, online meeting, online chat, sharing of suicide-prevention resource(s), or presentation to class/group/team. The peer helpers were asked two different sets of questions geared to get a sense of how often they engaged with peers and used their PH skills. The first set of questions asked, “In the last school year, how many times did each of these things happen?” and gave them the fixed-choice response options of 0 times, 1-2 times, 3-5 times, or 6 or more times.

Peer helpers were asked how many times peers talked to them about their problems in the last year. There were very slight difference between the two semesters in the proportion of responses in each answers range, with a large minority of PHs reporting 6 or more times when peers spoke to them about their problems both semesters. Approximately 75% of PHs reported peers spoke to them about their problems 3 or more times in both semesters.

Table 39: Peers Seeking Peer Helpers

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
Number of times peers talked to me about their problems in the last year.	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
0 times	21	8.2	15	11.0
1-2 times	43	16.7	22	16.2
3-5 times	70	27.2	36	26.5
6 or more times	123	47.9	63	46.3
Total	257	100.0	136	100.0

Awareness of crisis and other mental health resources is a hallmark of suicide prevention. The acquisition of this knowledge and how it was shared was mentioned frequently by sponsors in their descriptions of PHP activities. About 30% of PHs in both time periods helped a peer with resources three times or more.

Table 40: Peers Helpers Referring Peer to Resources

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
Number of times I referred a peer to resources for help with their problem	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
0 times	54	21.1	36	26.5
1-2 times	119	46.5	60	44.1
3-5 times	57	22.3	28	20.6
6 or more times	26	10.2	12	8.8
Total	256	100.0	136	100.0

When asked the number of times they had supported a suicidal peer in getting help from an adult, majorities of PHs in both semesters reported supporting a peer at least one time.

Table 41: Peers Helper Support of Suicidal Peer

	Fall 2020		Spring 2020	
Number of times I supported a peer who was considering suicide to get help from an adult	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
0 times	93	36.3	68	50.0
1-2 times	98	38.3	49	36.0
3-5 times	38	14.8	13	9.6
6 or more times	27	10.5	6	4.4
Total	256	100.0	136	100.0

The second set of engagement questions were asked only in the post program survey. Peers were asked to estimate the number of students they helped using specific peer helper skills. Table 42 shows those numbers by ranges, presents the mean and mode for each question and the number of total students helped. Almost 70% of peer helpers referred a student to an adult at least one time for an average of almost 2 times and almost 65% reported using the 6-step model at least one time for an average of almost 2 times. Over the course of the school year, PHs reported helping a total of 978 students by reaching out to see how they were doing; 69.7% reported offering this support 5 times or more. PHs reported listening to 916 students to help them through difficulty; 67.2% of PHs said they did this 5 times or more.

Table 42: Estimated Number of Students Served by Peer Helpers in the School Year

Estimate the numbers of student you helped with the following peer helper skills								
	Referred to an adult or professional help		Used 6-step helping skill model to help solve a personal problem.		Reached out to see how someone was doing		Listened to someone through difficulty	
Number of times	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
0	40	31.5	45	35.7	4	3.3	5	4.2
1 to 2	50	39.4	40	31.7	13	10.7	14	11.8
3 to 4	22	17.3	28	22.2	20	16.4	26	21.8
5 to 6	10	7.9	9	7.1	25	20.5	25	21.0
7 to 8	3	2.4	2	1.6	14	11.5	19	16.0
9 or more	2	1.6	2	1.6	46	37.7	30	25.2
Total	127	100.0	126	100.0	122	100.0	119	100.0
	Mean 1.8; Median 1		Mean 1.8; Median 1		Mean 8.0; Median 6		Mean 7.7; Median 5	
Total students helped	263		229		978		916	

Peer Helper Perceptions of their School Climates

Two measures from the Apex survey asked PHs to indicate their level of agreement with statements about how the people in their schools interact. A large majority of PHs in both semesters (67.7% and 68.5%, respectively) agreed or strongly agreed that APS staff treated all students with respect. There was less agreement both semesters about whether students helped one another, even if they were not friends (47.9% in Fall 2020 and 52.3% in Spring 2021). The numbers of Peer Helpers who disagreed or disagreed strongly was less than 15% each semester and 33.1% of PHs in Fall 2020 neither agreed nor disagreed, as did 37.5% in Spring 2022.

Table 43: PH Perceptions of School Climate

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Adults working at this school treat all students with respect				
Strongly Agree	50	19.5	34	26.8
Agree	124	48.2	53	41.7
Neither agree nor disagree	45	17.5	25	19.7
Disagree	31	12.1	13	10.2
Disagree Strongly	7	2.7	2	1.6
Total	257	100.0	127	100.0
Students in my school help each other, even if they are not friends				
Strongly Agree	33	12.8	14	10.9
Agree	90	35.0	53	41.4
Neither agree nor disagree	85	33.1	48	37.5
Disagree	40	15.6	9	7.0
Disagree Strongly	9	3.5	4	3.1
Total	257	100.0	128	100.0

Relationships with Adults

The APS PHP management team expressed the need for improved relationships between staff and students to encourage student help-seeking. A large majority of Peer Helpers in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 (74.4% and 81.8%, respectively) said it was pretty much or very much true they had a trusted adult to talk to when they needed help. As part of the post program survey, they were also asked whether they had developed trusting relationships with adults through the PHP and 81.8 % said yes.

Table 44: Peer Helpers and Trusted Adults

	Fall 2020		Spring 2021	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
When I need help, I have trusted adults I can talk to				
Not at all true	12	4.7	3	2.3
A little true	54	20.9	21	15.9
Pretty much true	79	30.6	49	37.1
Very much true	113	43.8	59	44.7
Total	258	100.0	132	100.0

APS Staff Perceptions of the Peer Helper Program

The Peer Helper Program monthly outreach activities and service learning projects were meant to decrease stigmatization of mental health, increase knowledge of suicide prevention resources, increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of suicide risk, and to raise awareness of the PHPs. The 2021 APS staff survey results are a baseline for understanding to what degree these goals are being met.

Table 45 shows the estimated distribution by school of staff completing the survey. Using the number of staff for each PHP-host school provided by APS as a count we estimated the percent of staff who participated. Nine schools had more than 50% of their staff participate in the survey, with a high of 95% for one middle school. Overall, of the 1,645 estimated eligible staff, 35% participated.

Table 45: Staff Participation in Survey by School

School	Staff Completing Survey by School		APS estimated Possible Staff	% of eligible staff Completing Survey
Albuquerque High School	3	0.5%	121	2.5%
Atrisco Heritage High School	54	9.4%	141	38.3%
Cibola High School	40	6.9%	117	34.2%
Cleveland Middle School	33	5.7%	50	66.0%
Del Norte High School	40	6.9%	79	50.6%
Eldorado High School	70	12.2%	105	66.7%
Grant Middle School	1	0.2%	43	2.3%
Jackson Middle School	9	1.6%	42	21.4%
James Monroe Middle School	0	0.0%	66	0.0%
Jimmy Carter Middle School	1	0.2%	62	1.6%
John Adams Middle School	24	4.2%	48	50.0%
Kennedy Middle School	24	4.2%	37	64.9%
La Cueva High School	68	11.8%	106	64.2%
Manzano High School	27	4.7%	109	24.8%
McKinley Middle School	7	1.2%	41	17.1%
Polk Middle School	13	2.3%	26	50.0%
Rio Grande High School	0	0.0%	111	0.0%
Sandia High School	46	8.0%	117	39.3%
Taylor Middle School	38	6.6%	40	95.0%
Van Buren Middle School	1	0.2%	42	2.4%
Volcano Vista High School	77	13.4%	142	54.2%
Total	576	100%	1,645	Average 35.0%

The majority of respondents identified as teachers (66.1%). Support staff comprised 18.5% of respondents; three other types of staff were identified by less than 10% of respondents each, and there were 11 respondents who did not specify their roles. The average number of years staff worked at APS was 10 years (median =8) and respondents averaged 6 years at their current schools (median=4).

Table 46: Respondent Staff Role

Staff Role	Number	Percent
Teacher	381	66.1
Support Staff	106	18.4
Counselor	39	6.8
Administration	25	4.3
Social Worker	14	2.4
Not specified	11	2.4
	576	100.0

When asked about other school programs, clubs, or activities with which they were involved, 44.3% of respondents listed at least one additional activity, including 9 involved with a Peer Helper Program.

Suicide-Related Knowledge and Experience

The APS SP PHP occurred within a district-wide set of suicide prevention initiatives including staff training. As noted earlier, APS's suicide prevention procedural directive requires an annual training for staff of the warning signs of suicide, pertinent Board of Education policies, and processes for dealing with potentially suicidal students. This section looks at the acquisition and application of this information from the perspective of APS staff.

When asked how familiar survey respondents were with the APS suicide protocol, 53.4% said moderately or very familiar; 36.2% said somewhat or slightly familiar, and 10.4% responded they were not at all familiar with the protocol. Over 85% of counselors and social workers were very familiar with the protocol, and the majority of administrators (56.0%) said they were very familiar. Almost a third of teachers (32.3%) were moderately familiar with the protocol. About 16.2% of support staff were not at all familiar with the policy, as were 10.2% of teachers, 8.0% of administrators, and 2.6% of counselors. In general, staff were familiar with the APS suicide protocol.

Respondents were also asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "The APS mandatory Suicide Prevention and Awareness training module has increased my confidence in responding to students contemplating suicide." Overall, 54.0% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 29.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 13.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Administrators and teachers had the highest levels of disagreement (15.7% and 12.0% respectively). Two-thirds of respondents reported they had not had any training for suicide prevention outside of their mandatory training.

APS staff were asked how comfortable they would be in three different scenarios dealing with students having suicidal thoughts (Table 47). The response scale was 0-not at all confident to 10-completely confident. Respondents reported being very confident of reporting a student who had expressed thoughts of suicide and were only slightly less confident of helping a student who expressed thoughts of suicide and approaching a student who they heard may have suicidal thoughts. Staff reported a high level of confidence for all three scenarios.

Table 47: Staff Confidence Dealing with Students Expressing Thoughts of Suicide

Level of confidence dealing with the following situations.	Mean	Median	Total
Reporting a student who has expressed thoughts of suicide	9.8	8	574
Helping a student who has expressed thoughts of suicide	8.1	8	575
Approaching a student, you have heard may have suicidal thoughts	7.8	8	574

Considering the staff roles identified earlier, we wanted to know if there were different levels of confidence based on type of staff. Counselors and social worker were statistically significantly more confident in approaching and helping (means of 9.5 for each one) when compared to teachers (mean 6.4 and 6.7, respectively) and support staff (6.4 and 6.5 respectively). There were no statistically significant differences in reporting.

To measure how often they used suicide prevention information covered in their APS training, staff were asked, "Thinking about the 2020-2021 school year, about how often did you talk about the following topics with a student or students in your school?" The topics were availability of mental health

resources, recognizing when someone might be suicidal, and their status as a mandatory reporter for students who disclose thoughts of self-harm.

Approximately third of respondents did not discuss with students either recognizing signs of suicide or their mandatory reporting status (36.2% and 32.9%, respectively) in the 2020-2021 school year and 17.2% never discussed mental health resources. Most staff discussed signs of suicide and their mandatory reporter status once or twice in the last school year (42.9% and 46.9%) and discussed mental health resources monthly or more frequently (44.9%). About 21% of respondents discussed with students recognizing signs of suicide and their mandatory reporting status at least monthly (20.9% and 20.3%).

Table 48: Staff/Student Discussions about Mental Health and Suicide-Related Topics

	Mental health resources		Recognizing signs of suicide		Mandatory reporter status	
Frequency	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Daily	14	2.8	8	1.6	12	2.4
Weekly	81	16.4	22	4.5	26	5.3
Monthly	127	25.7	73	14.8	62	12.6
Once this semester	110	22.3	131	26.5	116	23.5
Once this school year	77	15.6	81	16.4	115	23.3
Never	85	17.2	179	36.2	162	32.9
Total	494	100.0	494	100.0	493	100.0

APS staff were asked about barriers to students seeking help for suicide-related thoughts. The five most frequently identified barriers are reported in Table 49. These barriers included feeling like nothing could help, embarrassment, social stigma, fear of being reported and fear of disappointing others.

Table 49: Barriers to Student Help-Seeking for Suicide-related Thoughts.

Barrier	Count	Percent
Feeling like nothing will help	409	71.1
Embarrassment	363	63.0
Social stigma	352	61.2
Fear of being reported	334	58.1
Fear of disappointing others	324	56.3

Table 50 reports the roles for staff and students in suicide prevention for students at their schools from the viewpoint of staff. We wanted to know about the current state of student and staff roles and whether staff thought they and students *should* have a role. While 90.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed staff *should* have a role in student suicide prevention, 77.8% agreed or strongly agreed staff *do* have a role. Similarly, 88.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed students *should* have a role in student suicide prevention and 60.7% said they *did* have a role.

Table 50: Staff and Student Roles in Suicide Prevention at Your School

	Staff Members				Students			
	Should have a role		Do have a role		Should have a role		Do have a role	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent

Strongly Disagree	7	1.4	6	1.2	11	2.2	15	3.0
Somewhat Disagree	9	1.8	19	3.8	6	1.2	40	8.0
Neither	32	6.4	86	17.2	42	8.4	141	28.3
Somewhat Agree	147	29.4	214	42.8	153	30.7	201	40.3
Strongly Agree	305	61.0	175	35.0	287	57.5	102	20.4
Total	500	100.0	500	100.0	499	100.0	499	100.0

Current Climate for Suicide-related Supports

The Apex Peer Helper Recruitment Survey asked students to identify adults they thought were honest, trustworthy, and caring, people who they would be comfortable going to with a personal problem. APS staff were asked about the likelihood of students with suicidal thoughts going to staff in eleven different roles. Respondents rated each one on a scale from very unlikely to very likely. Table 51 reports the combined two unlikely answers, the two combined likely choices, and the Don't Know category. Majorities of staff indicated it was likely or very likely that a student with suicidal thoughts would reach out to any of the listed roles except for school administrators. According to APS staff, teachers and the peer's friends were equally as likely to be contacted in the case of suicidal thoughts among students (86.9% and 86.5%, respectively).

Table 51: Likelihood of students with suicidal thoughts reaching out to...

	Likely or Very Likely		Unlikely or Very Unlikely		Don't Know		Total	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Teachers	438	86.9	36	7.1	30	6.0	504	100.0
Their Friends	435	86.5	24	4.8	44	8.7	503	100.0
Club Sponsors	365	73.3	74	14.9	59	11.8	498	100.0
Social Worker	360	71.6	91	18.1	52	10.3	503	100.0
Mental Health Counselors	328	65.2	120	23.9	55	10.9	503	100.0
Academic Counselors	310	61.5	136	27.0	58	11.5	504	100.0
Support Staff	296	59.1	143	28.5	62	12.4	501	100.0
School Nurse	258	51.4	182	36.3	62	12.4	502	100.0
School-based (linked) health services (not school nurses)	249	50.0	151	30.3	98	19.7	498	100.0
Extracurricular Activity Personnel	367	73.8	72	14.5	58	11.7	497	100.0
School Administrators	133	26.5	316	63.1	52	10.4	501	100.0

Awareness of SP PHP and Sources of Awareness

Of the 484 respondents who answered the question, "Have you heard of the APS Peer Helper Program?" a majority (61%) replied they had. To discover how they knew about the program, aware staff were asked whether they had heard about the PHP from a variety of methods, allowing them to indicate all the ways they had learned about the PHP. The list is a set of potential pathways for natural diffusion of information (e.g., from a colleague), and those reportedly common to the PHP outreach activities (e.g., videos). Sources included PHP student-led activities (e.g., fliers), PHP sponsors or peers, and for some

the pathway was unclear (e.g., did PHP students or sponsors present for a staff in-service day, or was it mentioned by non-related staff for informational purposes?).

Table 52 helps answer two questions. The first is, “Among those who know about the APS PHP, what were the most frequent ways they learned about it?” Majorities of aware respondents said they had heard about the program from someone associated with the PHP (53.9%) and through school email (51.2%). Like several of the listed potential sources of awareness, the origins of the school emails are unclear, they could have been PH-initiated, from school leadership, or from sponsors. About 30% of aware respondents indicated an APS peer helper as their source. The five activities frequently mentioned in reports by PHP sponsors, fliers, school website, video, social media, and announcements, were noted as sources by fewer than 20% of aware staff.

The second question asked how effective each listed method in Table 42 was as a means of getting information to staff. Less than a third of staff heard about SP PHP from any one of the listed outreach methods.

Table 52: Source of PHP Awareness

Heard about it from...	Count	Percent of those who are aware	Percent of all respondents
From a teacher or counselor associated with the program	159	53.9	32.9
School Email	151	51.2	31.2
From a colleague	125	42.4	25.8
An APS Peer Helper	88	29.8	18.2
During a Professional development day or in-service day	70	23.7	14.5
Heard students talking about it	64	21.7	13.2
Flyer, sticker, or program t-shirt	55	18.6	11.4
School website	47	15.9	9.7
Video	42	14.2	8.7
Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.)	20	6.8	4.1
I am a PHP sponsor	7	2.4	1.7
Announcements	5	1.7	1.4
Other (e.g., from family, saw activity)	8	2.7	1.0

Excluding self-identified PHP sponsors, 61.8% of aware staff said they knew a PHP sponsor and 55.4% knew a peer helper. Of those who knew a peer helper, 11.3% reported having had a PH come to them for help with another student’s problems.

Aware staff were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale how familiar they were with the PHP (0-not at all familiar to 10 very familiar). The average familiarity with PHPs among aware staff was 5.5 suggesting that on average staff were familiar with the program. About 46% of respondents rated their familiarity with the PHP as 7 or higher and 20.9% rated it as 3 or less.

Table 53: Familiarity of PHP among aware respondents

	Count	Percent
Not at all familiar	8	2.7%
1-3	53	18.2%
4-6	107	36.6%
7-9	92	31.5%
Very familiar	32	11.0%
Total	292	100.0%

APS staff were asked whether they recalled hearing or seeing a message about four key topics covered by APS SP PHPs: destigmatizing mental health, suicide prevention helplines and resources, encouragement for students to tell adults about students thinking about suicide, and encouragement for students to seek help from an adult if they were having thoughts of suicide. For each of the topics, staff were asked to select all that applied from a list of potential information sources. Table 54 reports the number of staff who reported hearing each message and the percent of staff who received the information from the listed sources.

Majorities of staff reported having heard or seen information about each of the topics. Prevention helpline and resource information was received by 87% of respondents and 52.2% heard information about destigmatizing mental health. Encouragement for students reporting troubled student to adults and seeking adult help themselves was heard or seen by 67% and 70% of respondents, respectively.

The top three reported information sources for each message appear in **blue** text. The most frequently mentioned source of information for all messages was school email. Staff associated with the PHP was the second most frequently noted source of information for all messages. With the exception of the destigmatizing message, the third most frequently mentioned source for the PHP messages was professional development or in-service trainings. A colleague was the third most frequent source noted for information about destigmatizing mental health. The outreach methods most often discussed by PHs and their sponsors -- social media, direct contact with PHs, promotional materials -- were not recognized by respondents as frequent sources of information.

Table 54: APS Staff Awareness of PH Messages and Identified Source of Information

Message Topic	Destigmatizing mental health		Suicide prevention helplines and resources		Encouraging students to tell an adult about another student having thoughts of suicide		Encouraging help-seeking from students with thoughts of suicide	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Total who heard/saw the message	250	52.2	411	87	317	67	326	70
Message source								
School email	114	46	266	65	144	45	151	46
Flier, sticker, program t-shirt	25	10	90	22	47	15	60	18
Heard students discussing it	30	12	21	5	19	6	23	7
An APS PH	38	15	47	11	43	14	41	13
A colleague	67	27	121	29	79	25	72	22
Staff associated with PHP	89	36	190	46	135	43	147	45
Social media	53	21	64	16	40	13	46	14
School website	19	8	95	23	39	12	48	15
Video	39	16	50	12	41	13	53	16
Professional development or in-service day	65	26	137	33	91	29	97	30

The 2017 YRRS showed approximately 22% of all respondents reported they had seriously considered suicide; 16% reported planning suicide, and 10% reported attempting suicide. With this context, we wanted to know how often staff was called upon to use their acquired suicide prevention skills and knowledge with students. We asked staff how often they were in a situation involving students talking about thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts. For the 2020-2021 school year, they estimated the number of times a student told them: they were thinking about attempting suicide, they had attempted suicide; that another student was thinking about suicide; and that another student had attempted suicide. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year 75%-85% of respondents did not have a student talk to them about their suicidal thoughts or suicide attempt, or the about another student's thoughts of suicide. Between 10-12% of staff had been approached once during the year and 8-13% experienced one of these situations more than once. For each of the contact scenarios, most staff indicated the numbers were about the same as the last school year. Almost 96% of staff did not have a peer helper approach them about another student's suicidal thoughts, 3% had one approach during the school year and 1.4% reported a PH came to them more than once.

In discussions with the APS PHP management team, they spoke of a larger 'climate change' at the school level where students would be more likely go to trusted adults with their problems, and students and staff shared mental and behavioral health resources with troubled students. The logic was the destigmatization mental health would lead to students with thoughts of suicide being more likely to approach staff and peers, thereby averting a possible suicide. To capture a sense of this, APS staff were asked they had seen a change in the frequency of intervention and resources sharing activities from the

2019-2020 to 2020-2021 school year. COVID-19 very likely impacted the ability to create climate change and our ability to report this change. Future research should attempt to measure this change more clearly.

Less than 4% of respondents reported decreases in each of the scenarios. Most respondents (51.1%) indicated they did not know if there had been any changes in staff interventions, 23.6% reported an increase in these behaviors, and 21.4% indicated there was no change from last year to this year. For staff and students sharing mental health resources, 42% reported an increase in staff sharing mental health resources with students, 39.8% did not know and 16.4% saw no changes. For students sharing resources, 53.2% of respondents said they did not know, 29.1% reported an increase, and 16% saw no change.

Table 55: APS Staff Perceptions of Change from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 School Year

Activity	Staff intervening with students experiencing suicidal thoughts		Staff sharing mental and behavioral health resources with students		Students sharing mental and behavioral health resources with students	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Decrease	17	3.8	8	1.8	8	1.8
No Change	95	21.4	73	16.4	71	16.0
Increase	105	23.6	187	42.0	129	29.1
Don't know	227	51.1	177	39.8	236	53.2
Total	444	100	445	100	444	100

Discussion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the program. This includes a move to remote learning where teachers had limited contact with students, the use of remote methods to train and supervise PHs, the challenges in organizing activities and attendance, limited interactions between Sponsors and PHs, and the difficulties associated with PHs being able to interact with other students. The complete implementation and delivery of the program was impacted by the pandemic. In this section we point out when findings are likely pandemic-related conditions as opposed to program design elements.

The BHI funded two suicide prevention initiatives with APS under the same contract, only one of which is evaluated here. As noted earlier, the BHI contract funded three District Stress Management and Recovery Team members to acquire train-the-trainer certification for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). APS's addition of CISM trainers, any increase in the number of staff who participated in subsequent trainings, and how this initiative worked or impacted suicide prevention at APS is not part of this evaluation. In addition, we do not know how other APS initiatives and programs impacted the implementation of this program. It is important to understand this is not the only suicide prevention program.

This discussion compares the design and implementation of the APS program to NAPPP's standards and best practices for peer-to-peer programs. As noted earlier, standards and best practices provide useful information that can help guide peer helper program planning, training, implementation, service delivery, and program maintenance. Examples of implementation topics for comparison include staff and peer selection, required components in peer helper training, and service delivery.

Planning

NAPPP's programmatic standards begin with a *clear and compelling rationale* informed by formal and/or informal needs assessment for the program setting. The APS proposal presented data from the 2017 NM YRRS to show a need in selected schools: on average, 35% of high school respondents reported feeling sad or hopeless and 3.2% indicated they had been injured in a suicide attempt. Overall, 22% of all respondents (in 21 middle and high school) had seriously considered suicide; 16% reported planning suicide, and 10% reported attempting suicide. APS reported 1,473 suicide assessments conducted during the 2017-2018 school year. Importantly, two high schools were implementing the OSAH P2P model. APS serves over 80,000 students and lists approximately 27 district-wide initiatives that address suicide, mental health, and safety through curricula and services.

Using this information APS determined that not all students with suicidal ideation were being identified and a peer helper program would increase student and staff abilities to identify these individuals and refer them to an adult to start the internal APS referral process. APS also expressed this in terms of creating a climate where help-seeking, especially from trusted adults, would lead to more suicide assessments.

APS chose schools that showed a need in the selected schools for suicide prevention using data from the N.M. Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey. On average, 35% of high school respondents reported feeling sad or hopeless and 3.2% indicated they had been injured in a suicide attempt. Overall, 22% of all respondents (in 21 middle and high school) had seriously considered suicide; 16% reported planning suicide, and 10% reported attempting suicide.

APS also purposely chose the New Mexico Department of Health's Office of School and Adolescent Health (OSAH) peer helper program and adapted it for suicide prevention purposes. The Natural Helper program trainer for OSAH worked closely with the APS PHP and provided much of the sponsor and peer helper training.

The structure for implementing and operating the program followed the OSAH model and included all the proposed components that included:

- Sponsor Training
- Bi Weekly Meetings
- Peer Sponsors & Peer Helpers Retreat/Train the Trainer Retreat
- Monthly School Outreach Activities
- Service Learning Projects/Events that were to be student driven and focus on suicide-prevention.

APS had a clear and compelling rationale informed by data for the chosen program and schools that participated in the program.

Commitment

Buy-in from the District, each school principal, sponsors, peers, and the wider school community are important to the long-term sustainability of the PHP. We were not able to survey or hold focus groups with school principals or other administrators to better understand commitment. The sponsor orientation included strategies for obtaining buy-in from principals and administrators that suggests commitment and that the program recognizes the importance of building support. OSC devoted a 1.0 FTE position for central management of the program. This position centered on providing content and support for the 21

school Sponsors and encouraging program reporting for contract compliance with BHI and the Datahub evaluation tools.

A measure of peer helpers' satisfaction and commitment to the program was evidenced in response to the survey question: "Do you plan to be a peer helper next year?" Of students who were not graduating or moving, about 80% planned to be peer helpers next year, 14% said maybe, and 6% said no.

Commitment to the program has been shown.

Screening and Selection

The program adapted the OSAH Youth Selection Survey to help screen and select peer helpers and sponsors at the 21 schools used a variety of methods to distribute the surveys. Most sponsors compiled lists of potential peer helpers from the returned surveys based on the largest number of nominations. Some sponsors also asked for recommendations from teachers. Almost all the sponsors had advisory or selection committees of other teachers, counselors, or administrators to review the lists compiled from the surveys and other nominations; some enlisted all teachers in the review. One sponsor sent the list of nominations to department heads and asked each of them to choose students. At least one selection committee comprised staff identified by students in their surveys. In addition to student nominations, other criteria mentioned for determining who would be invited to be a peer helper included: to which activities and groups the students belonged, nominee grades, balance across grade levels, balance by unspecified diversity criteria, and nominees to whom teachers thought students would reach out.

Potential peer helpers and their parents were contacted by email and telephone to invite them to participate in the PHP or to attend an informative presentation about the PHP. Parental permission was required for participation. Some students declined the invitation, and some parents did not fill out the required permission forms for invited students.

We recommend the program standardize criteria to systematically recruit, screen, nominate, and select students across the 21 schools to become peer helpers. Further, we recommend the program use criteria that would more likely lead to a group of peer helpers who more completely represent the school and would be effective helpers, work well together, and contribute to the goals of the program.

The biggest challenge reported by Sponsors for peer recruitment was diversity. Whether it was gender, race or ethnic groups, grades, age, or by formal or informal social groups, sponsors and peers recognized the need to improve the representativeness of the peer helpers. Sponsors noted this was a bigger concern than Peer Helpers who believed they represented the school population in term of race/ethnicity, gender and grade level. **It would be useful to more completely understand if Peer Helpers represent the school body and the concerns noted by the Sponsors.**

Implementation

Training

NAPPP lists eleven training topics that should be covered to prepare peers for their roles (see sidebar). The original training agenda and curricula designed for the canceled day-long retreat overlaps this list. Due to COVID-19, training was broken into modules, creating greater variability in content delivery.

APS also incorporated suicide prevention topics in the training of Sponsors and Peer Helpers. Further, the majority of PHs participated in suicide prevention training as did Sponsors. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the number of trainings, attendance at trainings and potentially the quality of trainings by moving them to an online format. The requirements for public safety during the COVID-19 pandemic removed two critical training components for the APS PHP: the Sponsor Training Day and the Sponsor/Peer Helper Retreat. As noted earlier, the performance measures reported all sponsors had attended orientation and completed one of the assigned videos.

OSAH trainers presented training topics and provided information and activity suggestions for the online modules, which provided some standardization in the curricula delivery despite the change in training venues.

Tables 56 through 59 address some of the broadest measures of fidelity to the OSAH model and service delivery proposed by APS. Table 56 summarizes some measures of program implementation. **Based on a review of Datahub and peer helper survey data, the PHP exceeded the proposed number of peer helpers.** Although the estimates were greater than 100% recruitment on average, there was variation across schools. One high school had over 30 PHs both semesters and another school had over 30 PHs in Spring 2021. Three programs had declining PH counts in Spring 2021 but still averaged 10 or more students per semester. Two high school and two middle school programs had fewer than 10 PHs for both semesters, the lowest reported count was three and the highest for this group was 8. The expected number of 10 PHs per semester was met in 73.8% of the 42 program/semester units.

Table 56: Peer Helper Program Requirements and Achievement 2020-2021

Program Requirement	Per School Year	Expected	Actual and as Percentage of Expected for the Year
Number of PHs	210	210	Unknown. Estimated 287-314 (136.6% - 149.5%)

The requirements for PH training were shared with Sponsors as part of their orientation. Table 57 provides the percentage of programs that trained in positive youth development, suicide prevention, and peer helping skills based on the requirement of one training per year per school (n=21). The PHPs exceeded expectations.

NAPPP Core Topics for Peer Helpers Training

- Program orientation
- Characteristics of the helper
- Self-awareness
- Positive role modeling; maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Avoidance of temptation to offer advice, propose solutions or impose value
- Positive listening skills
- Recognition of limitations
- Developing individual and group trust
- Creation of support system of peer helper and helpees
- Development of a code of ethics and standards of behavior.
- Coaching

Table 57: Peer Helper Training

Program Requirement	Per School Year	Expected	Percentage of Expected for the Year
Positive Youth Development	1 per year	21	142.8%
Suicide Prevention			142.8%
Peer Helping Skills Training			114.9%

Sponsors reported completing 84 trainings on these three topics during the school year, meaning some trainings were repeated. Table 58 shows the frequency of PYD, suicide prevention, and peer helper skills training. PYD was supposed to be the first training after PHs completed their Fall 2020 surveys. Four PHPs (19.0%) did not report holding a PYD training in the school year; 13 PHPs (61.9%) held the PYD training each semester, and 4 PHPs held the training once in the school year. Suicide prevention was not held by 3 PHPs (14.3%); 6 PHPs trained suicide prevention once, and 57.1% (12) held the training both semesters. The majority of PHPs (12; 57.1%) held peer helper skills training once during the school year, 6 schools (28.6%) PHPs trained on this topic once per semester, and 3 PHPs (14.3%) did not report skills training in the school year 2021-2022. We do not know what caused the variation in the frequency of trainings during the reporting period. Part of this variation may be a result of the Datahub not saving data or deleting data. This issue was mentioned earlier in the report.

Table 58: Frequency of Reported Trainings SY 2020-2021

	Positive Youth Development		Suicide Prevention		Peer Helper Skills	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Did not train	4	19.0	3	14.3	3	14.3
Once	4	19.0	6	28.6	12	57.1
Twice	13	61.9	12	57.1	6	28.6
Total Programs	21	100.0	21	100.0	21	100.0

Activities

Table 59 reports the yearly meeting requirements for peer helpers and the requirements for projects (monthly and service learning). As noted elsewhere COVID-19 impacted the ability to schedule and hold meetings. Sponsors reported a total of 331 regular PHP meetings for the year (87.5% of the expected 378) while adapting to the challenges of planning and logistics for a mostly virtual program implementation. Because some PHPs met twice a week, we also examined the number of individual PHPs that met the 18 meetings per year requirement, 52% of PHPs met that expectation.

Tables 21 and 25 presented details about the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 monthly outreach activities, including the number of PHP projects. Table 59 reports the 77 outreach projects as a function of the requirement of one project per school per month. About 41% of the expected 189 monthly outreach projects occurred.

Because of overlap in reporting monthly outreach and service learning projects, Table 59 also reports a range of service learning projects undertaken based on those that appear to have met the eligibility criteria of being suicide prevention-based (7) to the number of projects reported by sponsors (33). Between 16.7% and 78.6% of the expected service learning projects were held. Sponsors reported this

for each activity but the overlap in monthly and service learning projects caused an unknown number of duplicate counts. Some of these differences may have been due to how information was reported.

Table 59: Required Meetings and Projects per Program per Year

Program Requirement	Per School Year	Expected	Actual and as Percentage of Expected for the Year
Peer Helper Meetings, Biweekly	18	378	331; 87.5% of expected 52.0% of programs reported 18 or more meetings
Monthly Outreach Projects	9	189	77; 40.7%
Service Learning Projects	2	42	33; 78.6% (reported) 7; 16.7% (met criteria)

Sponsors and Peer Helpers

Fourteen sponsors offered feedback for APS in the end of the school year Datahub report. The majority mentioned the challenging circumstance imposed in response to the pandemic and that they were looking forward to in-person trainings. Sponsors also mentioned the desire for a district-wide PH training, a monthly sponsors meeting for collaboration and idea sharing, training to be a better sponsor, and several thanked the APS management team for their commitment, program advocacy and support.

Service Delivery

We lack data to accurately report the number of students served by PHs during the study period. While this is true, we have limited indications provided by PHs in their survey responses. Approximately 75% of PHs reported peers spoke to them about their problems 3 or more times a semester. In addition, more than 75% of PHs reported referring fellow students to resources for help with their problems. About 30% of PHs in each semester helped a peer with resources three times or more. When asked about the number of times they had supported a suicidal peer in getting help from an adult, majorities of PHs in both semesters reported supporting a peer at least one time. Almost 70% of peer helpers referred a student to an adult at least one time for an average of almost 2 times and almost 65% reported using the 6-step model at least one time for an average of almost 2 times. Over the course of the school year, PHs reported helping a total of 978 students by reaching out to see how they were doing; 69.7% reported offering this support 5 times or more. PHs reported listening to 916 students to help them through difficulty and 67.2% of PHs said they did this 5 times or more.

Future research should study the interaction of peer helpers with fellow students in greater detail.

Supervision

NAPPP states, "... it is imperative that they [PHs] receive regular, ongoing supervision from program staff. In addition to regularly scheduled sessions, staff should be available to provide supplemental supervision and support as needed." Major goals of the supervision included enabling program staff to monitor program-related activities and services, enhance the effectiveness and personal growth of peer helpers. It would also encourage PHs to share with, learn from, and support each other in the performance of their helping roles. APS provided supervision at the District level with the funded 1.0 FTE Coordinator that focused on providing content and support for the 21 school Sponsors and encouraging program reporting for contract compliance with BHI and the Datahub evaluation tools.

Sponsors provided mentoring, supervision, and support to peer helpers. When asked to list three things their sponsors did well the most common responses included asking questions, listening (provided a support system), being there for them, communication, being kind and respectful, coming up with good ideas/facilitating PHs' ideas, making them feel safe/comfortable/a part of something, and good organization and planning.

Program Maintenance

Evaluation

NAPPP suggests programs develop and implement a formal evaluation including process, impact, outcome, and cost benefit evaluations. These data can be used to assess program effectiveness and inform revisions based on those insights. Evaluation is important for quality improvement (standardization of processes and structures to reduce variation, achieve predictable results, and improve outcomes for patients, healthcare systems, and organizations). **This evaluation meets this best practice.**

Awareness

Despite numerous activities meant to raise awareness of the PHP, it was among the three most common suggestions for program improvement by peer helpers. On average, peer helpers believed about half the students in their schools were aware of the program. About 60% of APS staff survey respondents were aware of the PHP in their school; for them, over half cited a teacher or a counselor associated with the group as the source of their awareness. The most frequent source of PHP awareness among all respondents (33%) was program-related staff. The lack of awareness of the PHP was a common thread in peer helper and sponsor comments about their monthly outreach and service learning activities. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to the program being online and learning moving to online it is not surprising that more students and staff were not aware of the program. The move to in-person learning should lead to increased awareness. A large portion of the APS staff who were aware of the program became aware through a teacher or counselor who was associated with the program. Increased in-person contact may make this easier. **Additional efforts to raise program awareness among staff and students should occur.**

The APS Peer Helper Program as a Suicide Prevention Program

As noted elsewhere the APS PHP is modeled after the New Mexico Department of Health's Office of School and Adolescent Health (OSAH) Youth Peer-to-Peer Helper program, which is modeled after the Natural Helpers Program and Sources of Strength suicide prevention program and incorporates the Peer Youth Development approach. Sources of Strength is a best practice youth suicide prevention program that uses peers to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide in school aged populations

The APS PHP is involved in a variety of suicide prevention related activities. To further anchor the discussion of these elements it is useful to briefly review the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's (SPRC) [*A Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention*](#). "Effective suicide prevention is comprehensive: it requires a combination of efforts that work together to address different aspects of the problem." (2021) Table 60 lists SPRC's nine strategies, each one "a broad goal that can be advanced through an array of possible activities (i.e., programs, policies, practices, and services)" (SPRC, 2021). The APS peer helper program has sponsors and peer helpers involved in at least seven of the nine strategies.

Further, Sources of Strength has been listed on the National Best Practices Registry (BPR) by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) and was listed on the SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) until the Registry was indefinitely suspended in early 2018. The APS PHP is a peer helper program that emphasizes suicide prevention.

Table 60 APS PHP Connection to Suicide Prevention Practices

Strategy	Involved
Identify and Assist	Yes
Increase Help-Seeking	Yes
Respond to Crisis	Yes
Postvention	
Effective Care/Treatment	
Reduce Access to Means	Yes
Life Skills and Resilience	Yes
Care Transitions/Linkages	Yes
Connectedness	Yes

Program Outcomes and Impacts

Potential outcomes for evidence-based suicide prevention programs include increases in health coping attitudes and behaviors, referrals for youth in distress, help-seeking behaviors, and positive perceptions of adult support (Stone, et al, 2017).

The program proposed outcomes of interest, which may need to be revisited. **It is important to ensure proposed outcomes are measurable, can be connected to the program, and are reported.** APS PHP management team staff noted they were seeking a larger 'climate change' at the school level where students would be more likely go to trusted adults with their problems, and students and staff shared mental and behavioral health resources with troubled students. To capture a sense of this, APS staff were asked if they had seen a change in the frequency of intervention and resources sharing activities from the 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 school year.

Less than 4% of respondents reported decreases in each of the scenarios. Most respondents (51.1%) indicated they did not know if there had been any changes in staff interventions, 23.6% reported an increase in these behaviors, and 21.4% indicated there was no change from last year to this year. COVID-19 very likely impacted the ability to create climate change and our ability to report this change. **Future research should attempt to measure this change more clearly.**

Conclusion

Under difficult circumstance, APS implemented a Peer Helper Program in 21 schools. The PHP included APS staff, sponsors, and peer helpers who participated in trainings, service learning projects, and outreach projects. Due to COVID-19, training events for sponsors and peer helpers were conducted as virtual presentations, which impacted the number and quality of trainings. Difficulty with logistics for meetings and trainings, and 'Zoom fatigue' for sponsors and students affected program participation and the quantity and quality of their interactions. The pandemic impacted the ability of peer helpers to interact with fellow students. Many of the issues experienced in implementing the program are typical

issues that arise in implementing new programs that were exacerbated by the pandemic and made the implementation more challenging. It will be useful to document the on-going development and implementation of the program since APS has gone back to in-person learning.

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