Online Referral
Pilot Outcomes Report Summary

Connecting School & Community

The AWARE Online Referral system provides continuity of behavioral health care for APS students and families

The online behavioral health referral system allows school-based behavioral health providers (school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists) to connect students and families with the community-based behavioral health services that will best meet their needs.

The intent of the online referral is to provide students and families with a “warm hand-off” to the community services they need and to improve access by destigmatizing mental and behavioral health in the Aurora community.

See appendix for graphic data
The referral was created in collaboration with Aurora Mental Health and Philippi Counseling to ensure that both school and community behavioral health perspectives were considered. The referral is a two-way communication loop between school-based staff and community providers.

The referral pilot began September 1, 2015 and ended June 1, 2016. In that time, over 800 referrals were sent to community behavioral health partners by APS Behavioral Health staff. Although there was no system to track referrals prior to this online referral system, this is believed to be a marked increase in referrals.

During the pilot period, community behavioral health partners worked collaboratively with the AWARE team and John Damhof to hone the referral content as well as the online system itself. In addition, school-based behavioral health providers were asked to provide input. This continual input resulted in improvements to the online referral throughout the pilot.

Excelsior was added to the referral as a community behavioral health partner during the pilot year. The AWARE team met with other community behavioral health providers throughout the pilot period to engage in partnerships and to collaborate in becoming partners using the referral system. These community providers include Aurora Mental Health Early Childhood Family Center, Arapahoe House, Aurora Youth Options, and Children's Hospital's Pediatric Mental Health Institute.

See appendix for graphic data
Data collected during the pilot year demonstrates enormous success and some opportunities for improvement and growth. The pilot data reveals that the percentages of referrals closely align with the district racial/ethnic and gender identity demographics. The number of referrals spiked at the onset of the pilot but remained relatively even throughout the pilot period at approximately 80 or more per month. The referral was most utilized by secondary and K-8 schools during the pilot period and 60% of the referrals identified Medicaid as the insurance provider.

Nearly fifty percent of the referrals were for students with an identified disability, whereas; students with disabilities make up just over 35% of the district’s student population. This may indicate that students identified with disabilities demonstrate an increased need for behavioral health services in the community and/or that staff are more aware of the specific needs of this student population. The disability category with the highest number of referrals, by more than 50% difference, was Specific Learning Disability followed by Speech Language Impairment, Serious Emotional Disability, and Other Health Impairment.

Ongoing analysis of pilot data revealed the need for more training for the community partner staff in completion of the online referral feedback form. This form allows school-based staff to be informed of the services the family and/or student are receiving and to communicate with the community-based provider to provide a continuum of care. This training has already begun and will be continued in the 2016-17 school year. The AWARE team will also continue talks with new community partners in order to add them to the online referral and create a web of support for Aurora students and families.