

Transforming School Wellness and Safety with iWellness Center



Introduction

Schools need help prioritizing student wellness and safety in today's rapidly changing, technology-driven environment. With the aftermath of a global pandemic, schools are challenged to address the intricacies of low self-esteem, social isolation, and mental health issues. Now more than ever, schools require innovative solutions to provide precise and practical support to students in need. iWellness Center is quickly becoming a leader in the educational software industry by offering exceptional solutions that redefine how schools interact with students to promote wellness and safety. Established in 2022, iWellness Center has become a reliable partner for school districts seeking deliberate and focused strategies to cultivate nurturing and positive learning environments.

Identification of the Problem

Amidst a landscape marked by escalating mental health concerns among students, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the challenge, amplifying preexisting vulnerabilities and emphasizing the urgent necessity for robust support systems within public schools. We cannot overlook the pressing need for robust interventions that prioritize student well-being and foster a nurturing educational environment. As stewards of our students' future, we must address these challenges head-on, ensuring that every student receives the support they need to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

National Contextualization of the Problem

The multifaceted challenges brought about by the pandemic—encompassing social isolation, disruptions in academic routines, and heightened anxiety levels—have led to a notable surge in students seeking mental health support. A 2022 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the severity of this trend, revealing that 69% of public schools have witnessed a rise in the number of students accessing mental health services since the pandemic's onset. Additionally, an alarming 76% of schools have reported heightened concerns among staff regarding students exhibiting symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, and trauma (NCES, 2022). These findings point to an urgent need for comprehensive mental health resources and support systems within educational institutions to address the growing concerns and ensure the well-being of students and staff alike.

Local Contextualization of the Problem

Swartz Creek Community Schools is a school district located outside Flint, Michigan, with an enrollment of approximately 3,600 students. At the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year, the district embarked on a transformative journey to understand its students' mental health and well-being on a deeper and more intentional level. A year earlier, Swartz Creek Superintendent Rodney

Hetherton had committed to broadening the district's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) around mental well-being and social-emotional intelligence. Superintendent Hetherton shared that the focus “emerged in response to the escalating social-emotional and mental health concerns on a national level, state level, and within the confines of our buildings.”

During a district MTSS leadership meeting, Superintendent Hetherton highlighted the district's challenges, referencing data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) showing that nearly 40% of children and adolescents struggle with depression, anxiety, and feelings of disconnection. Deputy Superintendent Jim Kitchen further underscored the seriousness of the issue, citing an alarming statistic from the American Psychological Association (APA) indicating that nearly 20% of high school students have considered self-harm and suicide. Both leaders emphasized the urgent need for increased mental wellness data collection to address these concerning trends, prompting the district to take immediate action to support student mental well-being.

The Solution & the Missing Piece

During the 2022–2023 school year, Swartz Creek Schools increased the presence of social workers and instructional coaches in the district's five elementary and two secondary buildings. However, district leadership knew that they needed to do more. Ultimately, they were striving to understand their students' unique needs better and tailor their support accordingly. **iWellness Center** proved to be that missing piece, by providing proactive engagement with regular student check-ins, while allowing staff to provide timely interventions and prevent issues from escalating.

Inspired by the vision of becoming a more proactive and caring school district, "The HUB" was established at Swartz Creek High School. The HUB exemplifies the district's unwavering commitment to promoting

“The HUB is designed to give students a safe place when they are having challenging moments. While in that space, they have resources to support them in building skills to overcome future challenges. With the iWellness data, I can ask targeted questions, leading to intentional conversations that reflect their well-being and address student challenges as they unfold.”

*Ashley Heatherton,
High School Special Education
Teacher Consultant*

student wellness and providing comprehensive support. Within the walls of The HUB are two dedicated school social workers, two student success coordinators, an instructional coach, the special education teacher consultant, speech services, English Language Learner (ELL) services, and a designated wellness room.

The iWellness Center platform's ability to be customizable allowed Swartz Creek Schools to select which staff members would have access to the iWellness Center data every week and which staff members would be responsible for intervening when support was needed. The HUB team, advisory teachers, and school administrators have immediate access to students' weekly scores, enabling them to “dig into” the numbers with precision and purpose. iWellness Center's Early Intervention data identifies students who may find themselves in the "High

Needs" category, and the staff immediately explores “the story behind the numbers.” With data analysis and through the iWellness customizable dashboards, staff identify trends, make predictions, and create Tier 2 and Tier 3 groups based on needs and targeted support areas.

“We knew the missing piece in working towards a true solution was the ability to collect real-time, consistent data measuring the overall wellness of our students.”

*Rodney Heatherton,
Superintendent*

The HUB staff have experienced the significant role both the physical space, acting as a sanctuary for students, and the iWellness Center weekly check-ins play in being proactive and intentional in building connections. This innovative approach has proven to ensure that students can effortlessly access the assistance they need, whether related to attendance, academic hurdles, personal struggles, or mental health concerns.

“The HUB is a place to be yourself and learn to love the person looking back at you in the mirror.”

*11th Grade Student,
Swartz Creek High School*

The iWellness Center Platform – Actionable Insights

At the heart of the iWellness Center platform lies the ability to transform raw data into actionable insights. Through advanced analytics, iWellness Center generates unique reports that highlight trends, patterns, and areas of concern. Administrators gain access to a comprehensive overview of student well-being, allowing them to identify at-risk individuals, track progress, and implement targeted interventions.

The foundation of the iWellness Center's weekly check-in process is rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, recognizing the fundamental importance of ensuring students feel safe and supported. By prioritizing this aspect, schools lay the cornerstone for cultivating a positive and conducive learning environment. The iWellness Center's weekly check-in was crafted to prioritize user-friendliness, ensuring that students can engage comfortably without experiencing embarrassment, vulnerability, or hesitation in expressing their feelings. Each question within the check-in is structured on a 4-point Likert-type scale labeled: "Not at all," "Somedays," "More than half the days," and "Nearly every day," fostering a straightforward and accessible means for students to convey their feelings during the given time frame. The seven questions are:

- *Do you feel happy?*
- *Do you feel safe at school?*
- *Do you feel like you can handle challenges?*
- *Do you feel connected to others?*
- *Do you think your friendships are healthy?*
- *Do you feel calm throughout the day?*
- *Do you have strong self-esteem?*

Swartz Creek Pilot Results: The Story Behind the Numbers

With the collaborative efforts with iWellness Center, Swartz Creek School leaders have transformed how they address student wellness at their high school from a reactive, staff-driven system to a *student-driven, proactive approach*. Administrators, mental health staff, and classroom teachers now have the tools needed to make data-driven decisions that prioritize student wellness in real-time. The results represent a paradigm shift at Swartz Creek High School and serve as an exemplary shift in how every school should look at addressing mental health.

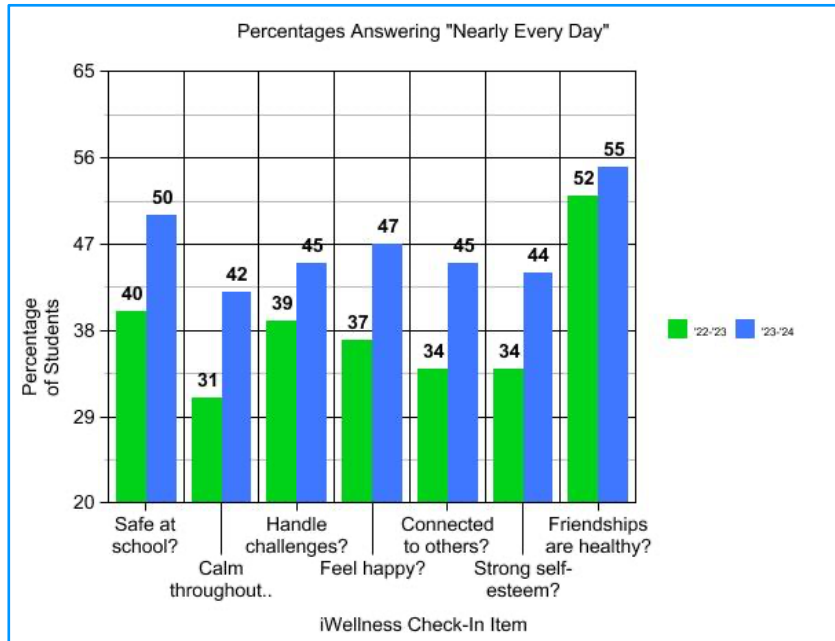
With two years of implementation under Swartz Creek's belt, the data gathered through the iWellness Center platform demonstrates clear evidence of improvement across all topics assessed within the weekly

“With iWellness Center data...our educators and administrators are poised to be proactive in their support, ensuring that students are always included and connected. [Our] commitment to our families and the well-being of their children shines through in this new proactive approach.”

*Rodney Heatherton,
Superintendent*

iWellness Center check-ins. These data points serve as a resounding affirmation of the hard work of staff and the efficacy of the partnership between Swartz Creek Community Schools and iWellness Center.

Since adopting this proactive approach to student wellness, Swartz Creek High School has consistently surveyed its students and administered over 4,000 iWellness Center check-ins to students in grades 9-12. The data collected and analyzed has demonstrated improvement across every category of the iWellness check-in. Notably, from the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students reporting "Not at all" in each area, accompanied by a corresponding increase in the percentage of students reporting "Nearly every day." This positive trend underscores the efficacy of the school's efforts in fostering a supportive and nurturing environment by making student voices, targeted interventions, and proactive check-ins a priority.



Next Steps

Swartz Creek Schools continues to be a lighthouse district in MTSS and uses data to drive decisions. This school year, the district has implemented the iWellness Center platform across all grades from 3rd through 12th and continues using iWellness Center check-ins to connect with students, find staffing capacities, and look for ways to strengthen the overall foundation of connecting with children. As iWellness Center improves features, adds to an already customizable dashboard, and develops more check-ins for schools to use, Swartz Creek will continue to be cutting-edge when it comes to educating the whole child.



Who We Are:

- Whitney Foley, C.E.O.
- Dr. AJ Hartley, C.I.O.
- Nicole Hartley, C.O.O.

“iWellness Center is transforming the landscape of school wellness and safety through our innovative software solutions. iWellness Center empowers schools to create connected, safe, and inclusive learning environments by elevating student voice, promoting proactive engagement, and delivering customized solutions.”

*Whitney Foley,
C.E.O., iWellness Center*

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