

**Notice.
Talk.
Act.[®]**

Mental Health Professional Development Program

At School

Impact Stories

AMERICAN
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Notice. Talk. Act.[®] *at School* Program Overview

The American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF) developed the **Notice. Talk. Act.[®] at School** program with the goals of increasing awareness of mental health in youth and effectively equipping middle and high school educators and personnel with tools to recognize potential issues so students in need can receive help. Shifting emphasis from obtaining a specific disorder diagnosis to developing practical, evidence-based skill sets, the program focuses on the knowledge and skills needed to notice early warning signs of mental health conditions, to talk effectively with students exhibiting those signs, and to act by connecting those students and their families to appropriate services and supports. Collaboratively formulated with the expertise of school mental health professionals, psychiatrists, teachers, and school administrators who represent diverse communities in geography, ethnicity, socioeconomics and race, the training program has been shown to be practical and effective across school staff of different educational backgrounds.





Stafford County School District, VA

When did they implement **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School?**

Stafford County Public Schools' H.H. Poole Middle School and Dixon Smith Middle School introduced **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** to staff at the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

What has been the impact?

Melissa Rinker, a school social worker with Stafford County Schools, spoke on the impact the **Notice. Talk. Act.®** key framework has had on the staff of H.H. Poole Middle School: "It has been tremendous because studies show that having a relationship with a trusted adult helps students to talk about what they're experiencing."

She continued: "Our teachers are in school to teach, but educating them about mental health awareness and how to start those conversations has empowered them. They now know how to talk with students with whom they've developed a rapport, and those students feel more comfortable talking with someone they know."

"I feel like it's **given us a regimented system** about how to approach students about mental health issues or concerns," Rinker said.

Before, teachers would bring students they were worried about to the counseling center. Now, they have conversations with the students first, using what they learned during the **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** training, and then share with the mental health team their concerns.

The new structure has been invaluable during the pandemic, Rinker explained. Not only can teachers refer students through the online system, but students can, as well. "We also have parent referrals this year, which has been huge because we're depending on parents to notice anything going on since kids are at home," Rinker said.

The **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** program trains school staff to notice anything that deviates from a student's baseline behavior. When a teacher starts a conversation, they can ascertain if the student has simply had a bad day or if the student would benefit from seeing a school mental health professional. Rinker explained how the program taught teachers the OARS method, in which the O stands for asking open-ended questions, the A refers to affirming what the student has said, R is reflecting, and S is summarizing. "That helps teachers think, 'Okay, I can have these conversations with the kids,'" Rinker said.

"It was such a **weight off my shoulders** that we already had this mental health support in place for the schools when the pandemic started," Rinker said. "It's helped the kids get acclimated to the new environment, and it's promoted resiliency with some of the kids."

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Lisa Arthur, a focus resource teacher for Dixon-Smith Middle School, described what from the **Notice.Talk.Act.®** key framework that she can apply in her teaching, even during virtual learning.

"The training helped us become a little more enlightened and aware about what's going on with some of our students," Arthur said. "It's helped us notice those little signs that we may have overlooked before."



In one instance, when Arthur noticed a student's behavior deviating from their norm, she talked with the student and the parents, gathered information that deemed a referral, and then ultimately reached out to the counseling office.

“We are now able to notice when something doesn't look right, and we can determine if students are just having a bad day, or when there is something deeper going on.”

“We are not mental health professionals who have been trained to make diagnoses, and the **Notice. Talk. Act.**® training recognizes that,” Arthur continued. “We are now able

to notice when something doesn't look right, and we can determine if students are just having a bad day, or when there is something deeper going on.” Completing the program even inspired Arthur to take a class on social and emotional wellness last fall.

Lisa Arthur put what she learned through **Notice. Talk. Act.**® into action when a student ran away. “We'd get hit or miss responses: The student would reply to me about school, but wouldn't talk to me about things going on socially, and then would respond to the case manager about social issues,” Arthur said. But because of the **Notice. Talk. Act.**® training, it felt as if she and her colleagues were on the same page. “So we managed to pull from all those different angles and get the student home. It really does take a village.”



J.A. Craig High School, Janesville School District in Rock County, WI

When did they implement **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School?**

J.A. Craig High School in Janesville, WI, introduced **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** to staff at the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

What has been the impact?

Craig High School is located in Rock County, Wisconsin, which has one of the highest adverse childhood experiences (ACES) scores in the state, according to its principal, Alison Bjoin, Ed.D. “There is a definite need at Craig and in our community to have clear and concise messaging to address concerns. We needed a program like this,” Bjoin explained.

Craig High School implemented **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year. Bjoin found that the training has helped staff work together and address what students are experiencing, especially after transitioning to virtual learning.

For students who are feeling isolated or unsure of who they can talk to, having a school staff member reach out and take the extra step to connect can make a huge difference, Bjoin said.

Craig H.S. math teacher Crystal Alling pointed out: “The power in the training is that you practice having the conversation you might have with a student when you notice something that might not be in the category of typical adolescent development.”

“It’s not that the school staff don’t want to say something, it’s that they don’t know how. The notice part is important in terms of what they should be paying attention to, but then what do they say?” she emphasized.

“I think so often people just don’t know what to say,” Alling continued. “But actually practicing during the training what words you can say and what might work, it really helps.”

Shelly Osmond, a guidance counselor who leads the school’s student services center, found that comprehensively implementing the **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** program was ideal. “The beautiful thing is that we trained the entire building because we have so many students that not only have personal connections with teachers, but also with the food services staff or the custodial staff, and it’s just as important that those personnel get this training as anybody else in the building,” said Osmond.

“When we do the training, we make sure everybody knows what the reporting process is and how they can reach out to our [student services center] staff if they need anything,” Osmond continued. “It’s unbelievable to see how relieved everyone is when they realize that they don’t have to tackle these problems on their own.”



“What we see can be anything from a student whose grades or attendance might start to fluctuate, or one who maybe wrote something in a paper that could be considered dark or





a red flag, all the way up to a student who might be dealing with some mental health issues,” Osmond said. “We’ve made sure everyone knows that there’s a process they can follow and they’re not on their own.”

When Craig High School was still teaching students in person, Robert Ward, a personal finance teacher with the school, had a student who was really engaged at the start of the semester, then suddenly started falling asleep in class.

“I reached out to that student’s parents [about that issue], and later, when we started distance learning, I found out from them that the student was having some mental health issues,” Ward said. Having completed **Notice. Talk. Act.® at School** training, Ward felt comfortable reaching out directly to the student.

“I said, ‘I understand what you are experiencing, and we can work together to take care of the work you missed when we moved to distance learning,’” Ward recounted. “The student had

become overwhelmed because when we started distance learning, it was hard to find motivation after having already fallen behind. It was the mentality of, ‘I’m never going to catch up, so

why should I even try?’ But we ended up working on it slowly together, and the student did much better.”

“The training allows us to show these students that our most important job is helping them,” Ward said. “When they see that human side of us through our implementing **Notice.**

Talk. Act.® at School, they learn that people care, and that can lead to better learning because now they feel safe, secure, and loved.”

“The beauty of the whole thing is that it creates a framework in which teachers can learn not only how to notice, but also to talk with students and create that relationship,” Ward continued. “And it applies to the whole family, because when the parent and teacher can work together, the student knows there’s this whole circle of people around them who know how to help them.”

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Los Angeles County Office of Education, Los Angeles, CA

When did they implement Notice.Talk. Act.® at School

The Los Angeles County Office of Education began implementing **Notice. Talk. Act.®** at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. The office oversees 80 school districts, but operates its own set of schools which include court schools at probation camps/campuses and juvenile halls, county community schools, and two specialized high schools. Since the 2020 fall semester, **Notice. Talk. Act.®** has so far been introduced in three of the LACOE-operated schools.

What has been the impact?

Chrislyn Nefas, M.A., research and evaluation coordinator with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, said that in an internal survey of after school staff who were initially trained with **Notice. Talk. Act.®**, 98 percent of them reported they were planning to implement or use what they had learned.

The program has created a lot more awareness of the mental health services available among school staff, explained Elsa Garcia-Sanda, L.C.S.W, coordinator and psychiatric social worker at the Los Angeles County

Office of Education. “It’s encouraged people to think more about early intervention, and that’s huge, especially while we’re experiencing a pandemic,” she said.

“People feel a lot more empowered after the training,” Garcia-Sanda said. “It can feel very overwhelming if they feel that they’re in it alone when they’re helping students out.” For staff who might often feel like their “hands are tied,” this training “reassures them that there are actionable steps they can take to help students,” she explained.

“We really tried to emphasize what behaviors are concerning,” she continued. “A lot of the disruptive behaviors, like if they’re trying to be funny or impress their friends, staff could see as typical teen behavior, but **Notice. Talk. Act.®** training explains that sometimes it’s a combination of things that we might notice in students.”

Nefas noted the important value of learning conversational techniques that foster dialogue through the training. “**Notice. Talk. Act.®** emphasizes having open-ended conversations with students, taking away pre-judgments and showing staff how conversations go when they’re closed or directed in a certain way, versus open-ended,” Nefas said. “That was a really great takeaway, and we’ve heard positive feedback from our teachers.”

“This training takes off the pressure,” Nefas continued. “It’s training around mental health but it’s really letting teachers know that they’re not just there to teach, they’re there to build those relationships with students, so they can recognize patterns or behaviors and then refer the student to someone who is there in the school to help.”

“The simplicity of the program is ideal,” Garcia-Sanda said. “It’s really easy to remember, and I think people appreciate that, especially now as we’re in the middle of the pandemic, and people are on Zoom all day. When you break it down into three simple steps, it’s much easier to grasp.”

“At the end of the day, we think this will make students feel more welcome because there are more adults in their lives who are looking out for them,” Garcia-Sanda continued. “High school can be a very lonely experience, so if there are more adults they can turn to, I think they will feel a lot more secure in their environments. I also really believe this program complements the efforts to build a positive and welcoming school climate.”

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About The APA Foundation

People see the profound impact of mental health on their lives, families and communities. Through the American Psychiatric Association Foundation's community-based programs, fellowships, awards and grants, we address critical mental health needs and direct resources where they are needed most. All of our initiatives focus on one goal: A mentally healthy nation for all.

Medical science, public education and dedication drive our vision of national awareness, personalized treatment, and compassion. As the charitable foundation of the American Psychiatric Association, we:

- » Raise awareness and overcome barriers.
- » Invest in the future leaders of psychiatry.
- » Support research and training to improve mental health care.
- » Lead partnerships to address public challenges in mental health.

With the backing of the APA, the world's leading psychiatric organization, our efforts are strengthened by research and designed to achieve results ensuring that we are making real impact, every step of the way.

To learn more about the APA Foundation

Please visit apafdn.org. To learn more about the school-based program please contact

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