

Children's Mental Health Local Advisory Committee (CMHLAC) Agenda & Meeting Minutes

Date: 02.12.26

Time: 9 AM - 10 AM

Virtual

Agenda

1. Call to order at 9.00 AM
2. Roll call & introductions of members (check in [here](#)):
3. Approve the [minutes](#) of the January 15, 2026 meeting.
4. Under unfinished business:
 - a. Inner Explorer update: Tamara summarized that Battle Lake and another school have adopted Inner Explorer to meet the mental health requirement for staff and to provide skill based tools for youth, focused on teaching self-regulation skills. A demo account was offered for those interested.
 - b. Mini-grant update: tamara again reviewed that mini grants are open for application. She explained that the mini-grant application process is straightforward and can provide up to \$500 for mental health-related projects within 10 minutes.
5. New Business:
 - a. Tamara Aklilu and Reese Ellison shared [MSS data](#) and invitation to a data party in April. The data was from the 2025 youth survey in Otter Tail County, noting that participation was high with only two schools opting out and discussed strategies to demonstrate the benefits of the survey data to schools that may be hesitant to participate, emphasizing the importance of explaining how the information is used to address student well-being. Reese and Tamara A. compared the results to state averages and pre-pandemic levels, highlighting areas where Otter Tail County scored lower, such as dealing with disappointment and finding ways to cope with hard situations. Tamara Aklilu presented data on youth well-being and empowerment, noting that while 68% statewide and 67% in Otter Tail County responded positively to questions about thinking about their purpose in life, 33% did not respond positively. Reese discussed empowerment metrics, highlighting that while some areas showed improvement from pre-pandemic levels, the county's scores were generally below the statewide average, though trending in a positive direction. The group discussed ways to increase youth involvement and empowerment, with Tera and Estelle noting that referral data showed patterns in upper elementary ages, while high schoolers showed less behavioral issues at school.

The data revealed concerning statistics about student mental health, including low relatively low percentages of students feeling cared about by adults in their schools (44% locally, 48% statewide), compared to higher percentages for parents and other relatives. Participants discussed strategies to empower students and improve their sense of connection with school staff. School counselors shared their experiences and perspectives on the survey data, highlighting the importance of student voice and involvement in decision-making processes. Jenna described a program at Henning where the principal holds monthly "chats" with students during sliding study halls, allowing them to discuss concerns such as dress code and cell phone policies. The program has led to concrete changes, including a more flexible

dress code and student input on cell phone usage at school board meetings. While students appreciate having a voice, Jenna noted some disappointment when their proposals, like restoring a third study hall, were not implemented. It was suggested that community conversations focus on mental health rather than suicide, as it was found to be more approachable for participants. Further, mental health as a topic can be presented on a continuum from daily stress to severe suicidal thinking.

The conversation ended with participants reflecting on takeaways from the discussion and ways to maintain their own mental health and resilience.

- b. Meeting schedule change requested: would before noon Wednesday or Friday work for members? Most members were open to a change. The schedule for FY 27 will be determined prior to the Annual Meeting for approval by the Governance Board.
 - c. Planning for report to the County Commissioners on CMH
 - i. SWOT work from October
 - ii. Survey: should the workgroup survey front line staff and providers as well as parents (via a school's webpage) about mental health supports and gaps?
6. Share outs:
- Team members (especially school staff): Consider applying for the mini-grant for student mental health projects, including potentially supporting student-led mental health/anti-bullying peer education initiatives.
 - Reese: Visit Henning school on Monday to talk to SAD students (per Jenna's mention).
7. The meeting adjourned at approximately 10 AM.