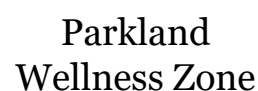




# Youth Wellness Zones:

## Launching a Place-Based Approach to Support Youth Mental Health

NOVEMBER 2024



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

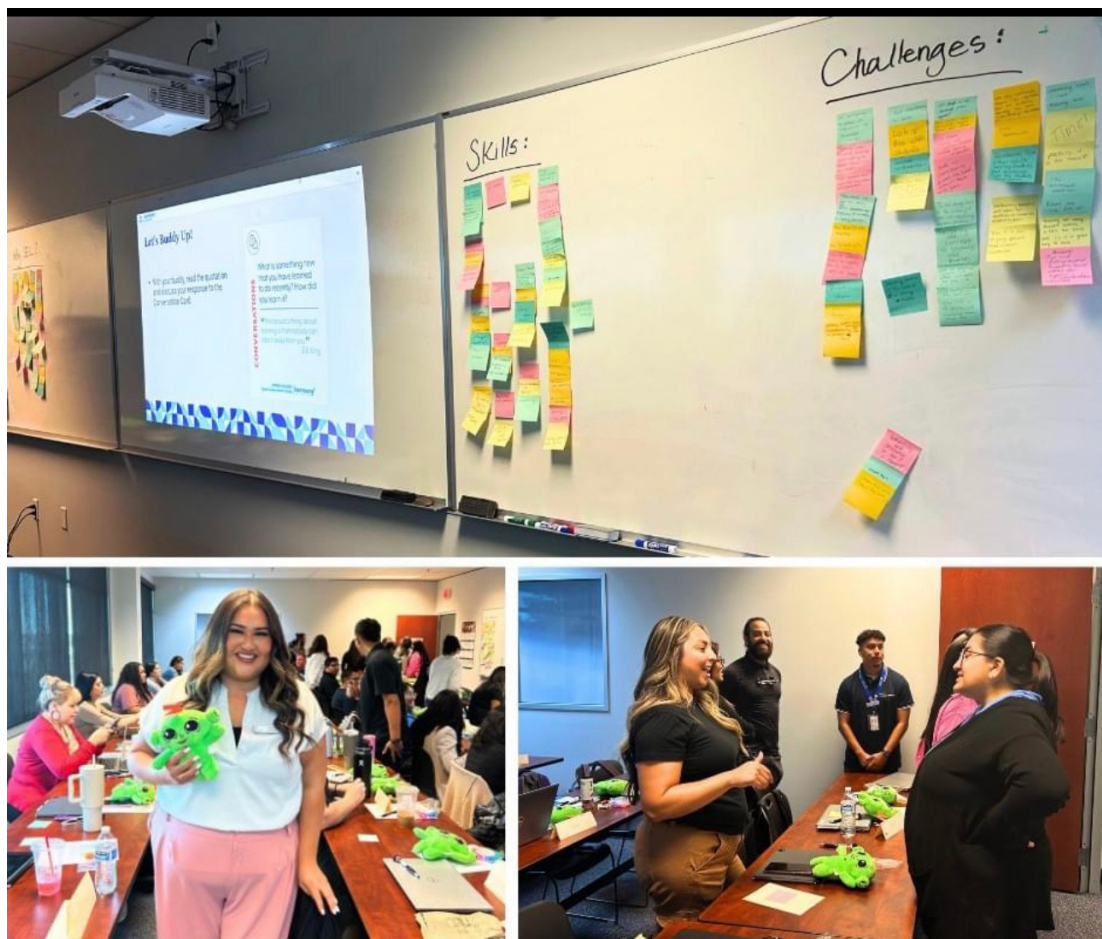
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The existing shortage of mental and behavioral healthcare providers highlights the limitations of solely relying on treatment to address youth mental health and wellness. New strategies need to be considered as part of the government's response to the current youth mental health crisis. Given research showing the impact of the social and physical environment on youth mental health, place-based, collective-impact approaches may be well-situated to address the intricate factors related to child and adolescent wellbeing. A statewide partnership funded by a Washington state legislative proviso is coming together to determine whether community-informed and embedded approaches, Youth Wellness Zones, can create meaningful, positive change in youth mental wellness.

*Photo courtesy of Parkland Wellness Zone*



Zones are hyperlocal geographic regions (place-based) that leverage local expertise and community engagement to align multiple organizations and groups towards common goals (collective impact). This approach focuses on making lasting changes to the built and social environment, service entities, and local policies. While the research literature in this area is small, zones and similar place-based collective impact strategies are a promising approach for child and adolescent mental health impact<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>. The state-funded learning community will advance knowledge of how and whether zones can improve youth mental health and wellness alongside traditional, service-oriented investments. The four communities involved in the learning collaborative include **Northeast Spokane, Yakima Valley, Renton, and Greater Parkland**. The backbone organizations supporting these four zones are The ZONE at the North East Community Center Association (NE Spokane), Yakima Valley Partners for Education, Renton Innovation Zone Partnership, and Kids' Mental Health Pierce County (Greater Parkland). These areas were chosen for their history of commitment to or interest in addressing youth needs through a place-based, collective impact approach.



*Photos courtesy of Yakima Valley Partners for Education*

Over the next year, each zone will adopt unique, community-informed and -led initiatives that center the voice of local youth and families:

- **Northeast Spokane** is supporting On Track Academy (a local project-based school) in the development and facilitation of two sections of a youth wellness elective. In this elective, students will identify youth wellness needs in their neighborhoods. They will develop strategies to improve wellness, engage in community outreach, prioritize wellness objectives, and operationalize improvements. Students will then mobilize and action these improvements through partnerships with local businesses, community leaders, and government officials
- **Yakima Valley's** zone will implement multiple strategies across the county including social-emotional curricula responsive to mental wellness needs, training for parents and youth in mindfulness curricula, suicide prevention training, community cultural events, literacy resources, and paid internship opportunities for students.
- **Renton's** youth wellness zone will focus on the implementation of The Boomerang Project's middle school transition program, Where Everybody Belongs (W.E.B.). This initiative connects incoming 6th-graders with 8th grade mentors for orientation, monthly check-ins, and scheduled hangout sessions in order to increase comfort and feeling of belonging in new students.
- **Greater Parkland** will implement a coordinated mental and behavioral health response, providing screening and assessment, multidisciplinary team meetings to triage and connect with neighborhood services, and bridge care by an in-school clinician while students access community supports and wait to be seen by community providers. This model will allow early identification of youth needs and connection to services, likely preventing larger issues down the line.

Each of these four zones will engage young people in defining wellness and informing the larger field about what is missing in communities. The zones thoughtfully involve children and adolescents in civic planning and place-based innovation centering community connection to directly and indirectly impact individual youth wellbeing. The University of Washington CoLab for Community and Behavioral Health, faculty from the Evans School of Public Policy, and Shine Strategies, a consulting group with expertise in place-based approaches to health, will support the learning collaborative to evaluate these strategies and disseminate information about these efforts to interested scholarly, community, and policy communities.





## BACKGROUND

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In the United States, approximately 5.8 million children and adolescents suffer from anxiety, 5.5 million experience behavioral problems, and 2.7 million struggle with depression (CDC, 2023). Less than half of youth with significant mental health needs will access formal treatment due to workforce shortages as well as distrust of formal treatment systems and other challenges in accessing care. Traditional mental health treatment by licensed mental health therapists is an important but, ultimately, limited approach in ensuring all youth have access to resources that will support mental health and wellbeing.

*Photo courtesy of Photo courtesy of Renton Innovation Zone Partnership*

A young person's environment is a key driver of their mental health outcomes. This includes aspects of the physical or built environment (e.g., presence of vandalism, public infrastructure, safe housing), as well as the social environment (e.g., availability of emotional support, local social norms, experiences of discrimination<sup>2, 5, 6</sup>). Research demonstrates that living in socially disadvantaged communities leads to negative mental health outcomes over the lifespan and early research shows that improving environmental factors is likely to improve those trajectories<sup>5, 6</sup>. A place-based perspective posits that community health, specifically mental health, can be achieved by improving social and physical neighborhood environments<sup>3</sup>. This could be due, at least in part, to place-based approaches being uniquely situated to effectively account for and respond to cultural beliefs and stigmas about mental health.

Place-based, collective impact efforts can also be leveraged to align treatment and crisis systems at the local level, looking to fill gaps in the continuum of mental health care. As an alternative to sector-based approaches, such as investing in schools, primary care, or specialty care in separate funding streams, place-based approaches aim to align services so these sectors work towards common goals while also focusing on non-healthcare needs impacting youth mental health including social capital, housing, education, employment, and the availability of social services<sup>2</sup>.

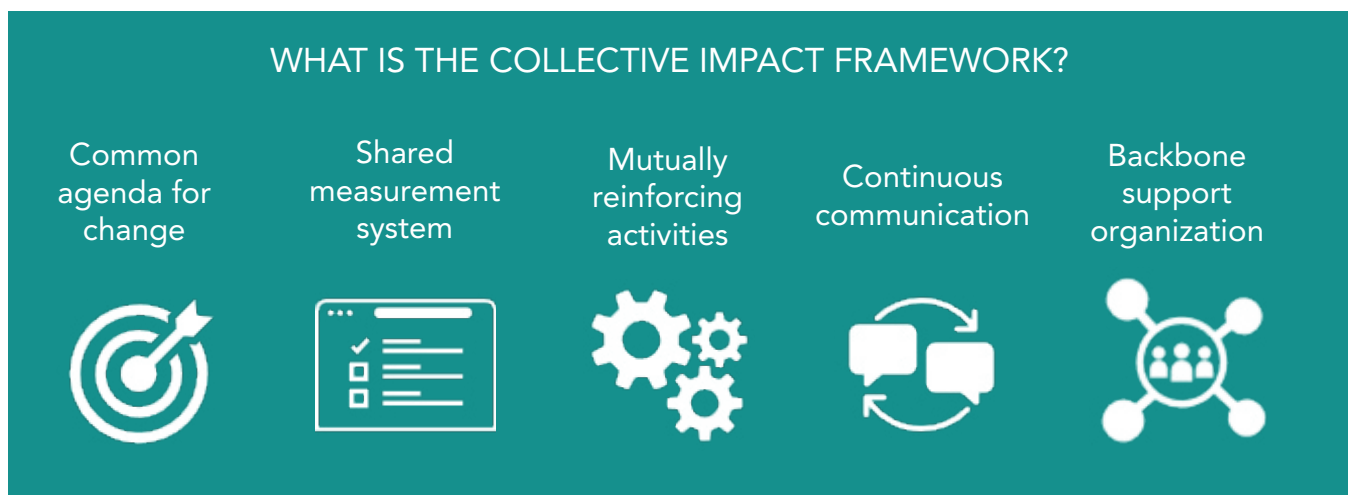
***A young person's environment is a key driver of their mental health outcomes.***

Washington state is supporting a learning collaborative to advance understanding of the promise and challenges of leveraging Zones to support youth mental health and wellness at a population level. The learning collaborative is facilitated by Shine Strategies, a nationally known consulting group focused on collective impact strategies, and includes research and communications partners CoLab for Community and Behavioral Health Policy and Evans School of Public Policy at the University of Washington. The four place-based communities engaged in the learning collaborative include Northeast Spokane, Yakima Valley, Renton, and Greater Parkland (unincorporated Pierce County). These areas were invited to join either for their proven track record in addressing child and youth needs through a collaborative community model or their interest in adopting such a model to tackle ongoing youth mental health challenges. Primary organizational partners include but are not limited to: North East Community Center Association, On Track Academy High School, Mabton School District, Granger School District, Communities in Schools of Central Washington, Yakima Valley Partners for Education, Dimmit Middle School, Middle School Transition Action Team, The Boomerang Project, Renton Innovation Zone Partnership, Kids' Mental Health Pierce County, Franklin Pierce School District, and Mary Bridge Children's Hospital.

The current initiative will utilize Zones to organize communities for place-based innovation. By leveraging local knowledge and fostering community engagement, Zones aim to create sustainable, impactful change in community health and wellness, focusing on built and social environments, resources, and policies. (These are sometimes called "community networks,"



“community empowerment zones,” or “place-based efforts”). Zones are hyperlocal, focusing on a small geographic area, like a neighborhood or a small city/town. They leverage local lived-experience and community participation as well as convening partners across school, health, faith-based, and other social sectors. This approach aligns multiple sectors towards common goals, requiring skills and resources to convene organizations, engage the community, plan, build capacity, roll out intervention, and track progress<sup>7</sup>. The collective impact framework summarizes this process<sup>8</sup> (figure 1). Zones are the preferred public health approach for this initiative, as they can be tailored to unique local conditions (e.g., social capital, housing, education, employment, resources) and can address complex issues arising from historical disadvantages due to discriminatory policies (e.g., redlining) that perpetuate economic and racial segregation, leading to higher crime rates and poorer health outcomes<sup>9</sup>.



**Figure 1**

This multi-sector alignment naturally raises questions about the role of government in supporting or facilitating local capacity-building efforts. To date, studies of collective impact efforts in child and family health have primarily focused on early childhood development, education, and adolescent substance use prevention rather than mental health<sup>10</sup>. Few studies have focused on youth mental health, behavioral health, or wellness and how/whether Zone approaches could be adopted as a governance strategies for the allocation of city and county resources. This may be because mental health is seen as an issue to be addressed by the healthcare industry and treatment organizations, rather than by the community<sup>10</sup>.

Efforts to reform child and adolescent mental health services have largely focused on improving access, engagement and quality within the treatment sector. While collective impact, place-based models hold great promise for improving the mental health status of children and youth at a population level, the evidence to date is largely practice- and consensus-based<sup>11, 12</sup>. Critical elements to achieving collective impact are known and can be applied to efforts looking to improve youth mental health and wellness using a collective impact framework<sup>13</sup> (figure 2).

The emerging literature on Zone approaches for youth mental health wellness emphasizes the importance of addressing social determinants of health by focusing on the adequacy of housing, childcare and economic opportunity as a complement to more traditional service mapping. These approaches recommend that communities convene housing, education, law enforcement, mental health, and social services to meet a broad range of community needs. Early efforts published in the literature also commonly employ and train volunteers, peer support and community health workers in delivering mental wellness curricula or coaching, as well as promoting help-seeking behavior among young people and families<sup>14</sup>. Many models focused on multiple outcomes (e.g., mental health, physical health, family support) to evaluate their success. Challenges arising from these efforts include tension from different priorities of stakeholders across sectors, maintaining clear goals and messaging, and securing adequate funding for implementing community-informed strategies<sup>15</sup>. Overall, place-based, collective impact models tailored to community context with integrated health services are highly promising approaches for increasing youth and family access to supportive resources important for youth mental health and wellbeing.

The yearlong implementation and evaluation of the current four youth wellness zones hopes to enhance local capacity for collective community action to address youth mental health and wellness in four pilot areas of Washington state: Yakima Valley, Spokane, Parkland, and Renton. The project aims to generate actionable insights that could inform future policy decisions and promote the use of similar zones as a strategy for improving youth mental health.

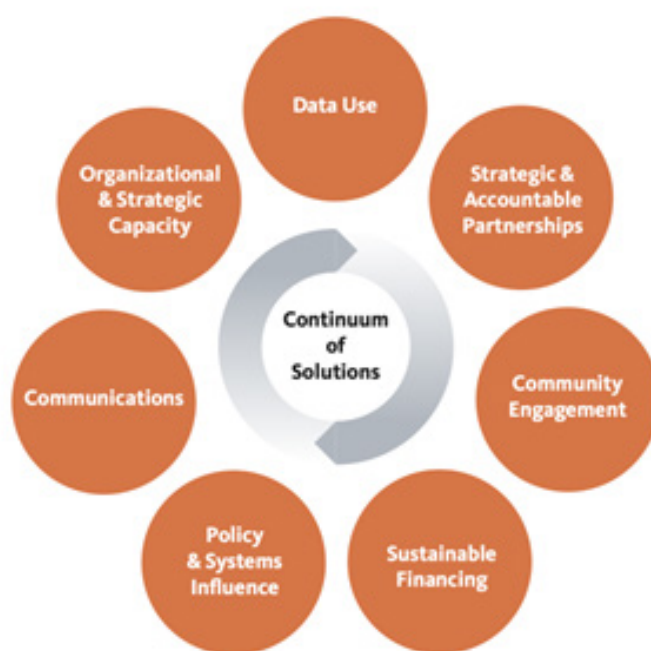


Figure 2





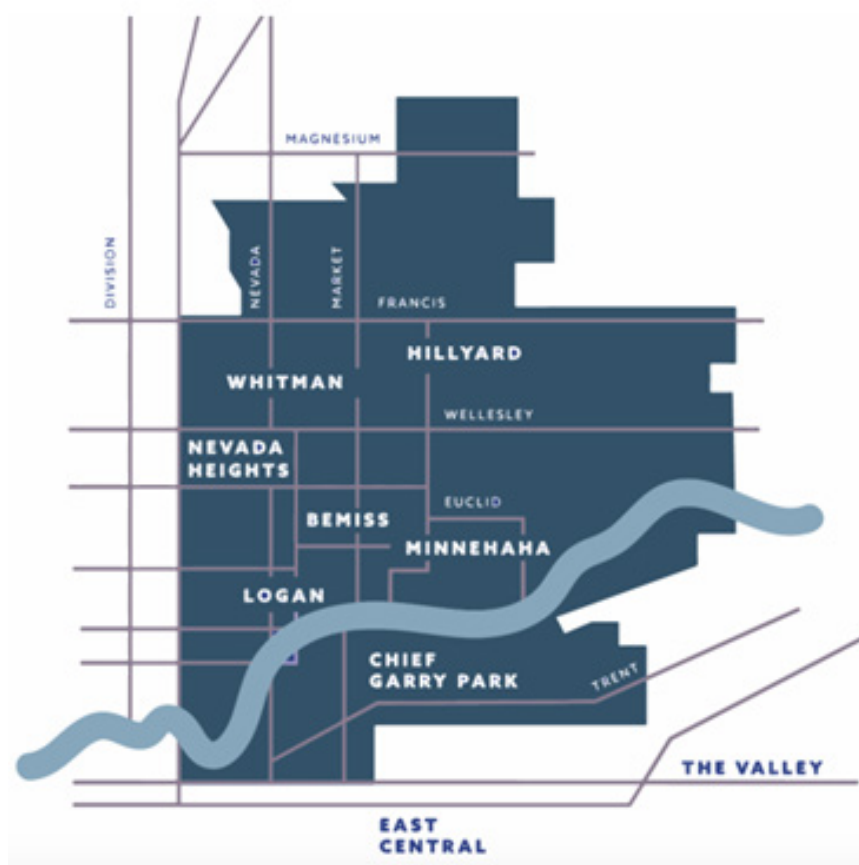
## ZONES

### Northeast Spokane

The Northeast Spokane Youth Wellness Zone, "the ZONE," serves Spokane City District 1, and is where the Northeast Community Center is located. Approximately one-third of the city's population resides in this historically redlined and marginalized catchment area. This district is one of the poorest zip codes in Washington. Households in Northeast Spokane experience twice the rate of family violence as the rest of Spokane, struggle with lack of employment opportunities, affordable childcare and housing, and crumbling infrastructure. This part of the city is particularly ethnically and culturally diverse.

*Photo courtesy of the ZONE*

The backbone organization for collective impact is The ZONE at the Northeast Community Center Association (NECCA), which coordinates and facilitates collaborative work in Northeast Spokane through the ZONE and a resident-led steering committee. For the Youth Wellness Zone project, key community partners include On Track Academy High School (a project-based high school) and The Chase Youth Commission. On Track Academy will offer Youth Wellness electives facilitated by the Zone wellness coordinator and the ZONE embedded staff member at the high school. Due to high student demand, two sections of the elective will now be offered and will meet during school twice weekly. In this elective, students will identify youth wellness needs and propose solutions to these needs. The ZONE community-based youth-serving partners will provide workshops to students to aid in achieving their project goals, the Chase Youth Commission will put on a community wide event for youth to present their top wellness priorities and solutions, and The ZONE will convene business and political leaders to develop strategies for implementation. Additional hours above and beyond the typical school day will be required of students participating in this elective in order to connect with community members.



The ZONE has a history of lifting up community voice and mobilizing in order to meet identified community needs. For example, when residents highlighted the need for additional, local mental health services, the ZONE established a new behavioral health clinic operating out of the Northeast Community Center. This clinic shares property with five public schools and allows for easy access to mental and behavioral health. Each school permits students to go to the clinic with a hall pass, and provides excused absences for these visits.



## Yakima Valley

The Yakima County Youth Wellness Zone project, All Students Belong, focuses on Yakima County and specifically the Lower Valley, a large, rural landscape that includes the Yakama Nation. Almost 22% of Yakima County youth are experiencing poverty, approximately double the state average (11.4%). The backbone organization for this youth wellness project, the Yakima Valley Partners for Education (YVPE) through Heritage University, applies a cradle-to-career approach through cross-sector and multi-partner engagement for collective impact. The overarching aim of the current project, All Students Belong, is to bring social-emotional learning to eight community school districts in a way that is practical and relevant for their unique populations.

Mabton School District, Granger School District, Communities in Schools of Central Washington, and Yakima Valley College (YVC) are current community collaborators with All Students Belong. Each of these community partners have identified their students' unique needs and will implement social-emotional curricula responsive to those specific mental wellness needs. Yakima Valley Zone is also funding four internships for students from this catchment area to research and implement their own youth wellness models. YVPE has already started convening groups of youth to gather information about current wellness approaches using art activities. They have also begun adult mindfulness trainings which have been received with great enthusiasm.

### *Examples of Participant Responses:*

- "I don't know how to express myself in an edited way to children to help calm and express frustration in a skill-based way - thank you for this training as it will help families communicate better with each other in their homes."
- "With meditation I experienced something like a metaphor of a restless child who was able to sit still."
- "This was new for me, I'm more energized."
- "I could feel tension release."

## Renton

The Renton Innovation Zone Partnership (RIZP) is the backbone organization behind the Renton Youth Wellness Zone and works to support the Skyway-West Hill and Renton Highland communities. RIZP has a history of creating and co-designing opportunities for historically underserved communities to thrive since its founding in 2017. After years of local planning and community-led development, the RIZP helped break ground for the Skyway Resource Center, a multifaceted neighborhood hub that will provide access to economic, educational, health and wellness, and leadership resources.

The current youth wellness zone project also focuses on Skyway, part of unincorporated King County, and specifically, Dimmitt Middle School. Dimmitt's 2023-2024 student population was 631, with 46.9% of the population identified as female and 53.1% identified as male. The school's racial and ethnic makeup is as follows: 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 36.5% Asian, 27.1% Black/African American, 27.1% Hispanic/Latinx (any race), 3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 9% white, and 8.9% two or more races. Approximately 62% of students are designated low-income, and over 33% are English language learners.

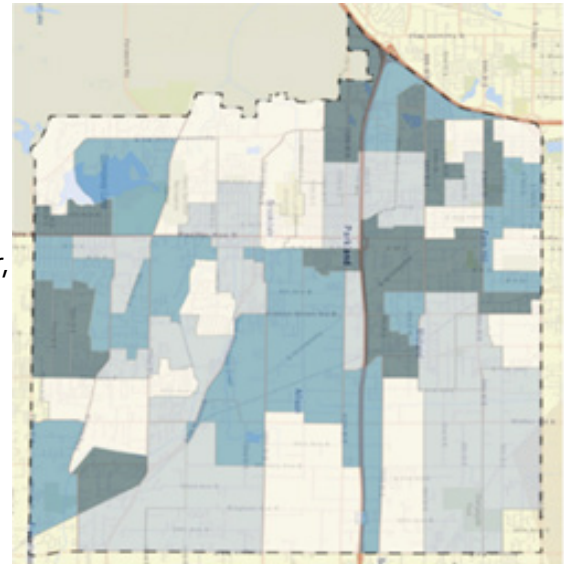


The project will implement the “Where Everybody Belongs” (W.E.B.) program, a preparatory curriculum for elementary students transitioning to middle school, starting with the 2025-2026 school year. W.E.B. is a middle school orientation and transition initiative designed to welcome rising 6th-graders and support them throughout their first year of middle school. Based on the belief that students can help their peers succeed, the program trains 8th-graders to become W.E.B. Leaders. As positive role models, these student leaders mentor incoming 6th-graders, guiding them through the transition and helping them understand what it takes to thrive in middle school.

Key partners in this project to advance youth wellness are RIZP and its Middle School Transition Action Team (MST) who will support Dimmitt Middle School's administrative team with its implementation and connect other community-based organizations to further enhance the program. The Boomerang Project will provide training, resources, and tools to execute the W.E.B. program at Dimmitt Middle School.

## Greater Parkland

The Greater Parkland Youth Wellness Zone project serves Greater Parkland, an unincorporated part of Tacoma in Pierce County. The racial and ethnic makeup of this catchment area is: 66% white, 13% Black or African American, 2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 9% Asian, 3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 7% another race, and 16% Hispanic/Latinx (all races). The median age in Greater Parkland is 36.5 years old, 23% of the population is under the age of 18, and 53% of families have kids under the age of 18. English is the most commonly spoken language at 74%, followed by Asian and Pacific Islander languages (10%), Spanish (9%), other Indo-European languages (4%), and other languages (2%). Over 200 youth completed a participatory mapping exercise to define the catchment area for the youth wellness zone.



Ninety percent of respondents on the Pierce County Children’s Mental Health Summit Survey reported that services in the area are disorganized and lack coordination. From 2015 to 2018, Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital saw a 400% increase in youth coming to the hospital with a mental health primary complaint. Mental health concerns represent the second to third leading cause of hospitalizations for Pierce County children ages 10-18. A 2018 community health needs assessment conducted by MultiCare and the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department reported more than one-fourth of Pierce County middle schoolers endorse depressive symptoms, one-fifth of high schoolers have seriously considered attempting suicide, rates of suicide are higher for kids in Pierce County than statewide, and four-fifths of the top issues facing youth in Pierce County are in mental and behavioral health (i.e., suicide, abuse/bullying, obesity, depression). Similarly, a 2018 healthy youth survey reported 40% of Pierce County high schoolers and 34% of middle schoolers reported having been so sad or hopeless in the past year that they stopped engaging in usual activities, 24-27% of high schoolers and 21% of middle schoolers have seriously considered suicide, 21% of high schoolers and 17% of middle schoolers have made a plan to kill themselves, and 6% of high schoolers and 7% of middle schoolers report at least one suicide attempt in the past year. Only slightly more than half of youth indicated they have an adult they can turn to if they feel sad or hopeless.

The backbone organization of the Greater Parkland Wellness Hub is Kids’ Mental Health Pierce County (KMHPC)—a coalition of people and agencies in Pierce County that have joined forces to tackle the behavioral health crisis among children and young people. KMHPC is supported by Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital and is committed to creation of a coordinated, responsive behavioral health system, promoting cultural responsiveness and equity, and incorporating youth and family voice into this work. Additional crucial Parkland wellness zone community partners are Franklin Pierce School District and Parkland-Spanaway Blue Zones Project.





## CORE DRIVERS & STRATEGY —

### Northeast Spokane

The core strategy for youth mental wellness in Northeast Spokane is the development of Youth Wellness electives at On Track Academy. In these elective courses, approximately 30 students will work together to define wellness and imagine what it might look like in their neighborhoods. A Zone-wide wellness survey was distributed in August 2024 to gather information about youth wellness needs from youth and families. They will develop strategies to improve youth wellness, engage in community outreach, prioritize wellness objectives, and operationalize improvements. Existing youth-serving organizations and partners will provide workshops to students to aid in visualizing their recommendations.

For example, College Success Foundation may offer a writing workshop, a photography teacher might demonstrate how to visually display examples of wellness, a local media company can film a short video of students explaining how the community could proactively support youth mental health and wellness. Students will co-present (with the ZONE director, wellness coordinator, and ZONE liaison) their ideas to local businesses, government, and community health groups in order to mobilize broader engagement. The ability to problem solve and co-create will be core to this youth-led wellness initiative. The ZONE will then convene groups of residents and business and political leaders to select and action youth wellness priorities in the community.



*Photos courtesy of the ZONE*

## Yakima Valley

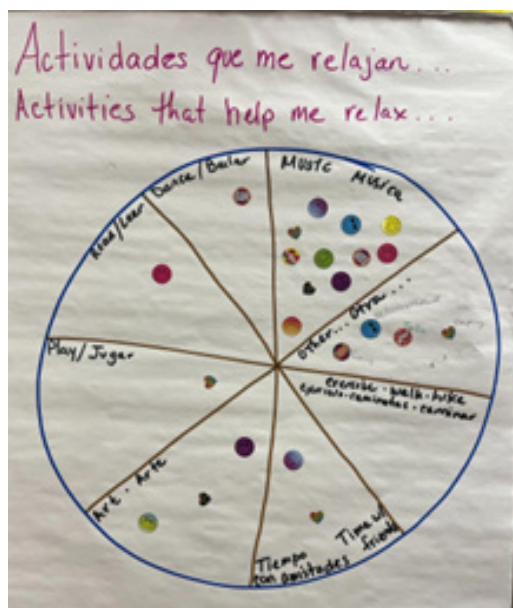
The zone in Yakima Valley employs several essential strategies for mental wellbeing across sites. Granger School District identified a need for suicide awareness and prevention, as their district experienced one known suicide in the recent past and more than 25% of their secondary school students have experienced suicidal ideation and/or ongoing feelings of helplessness. The core strategy at Granger is a thorough training, "Question, Persuade, Respond," for all students and teachers grades five through 12 in identifying warning signs, how to support students in getting help, and how to reach those students who cannot or will not access help on their own.

Mabton School District's central strategy to improve youth mental health is multi-tiered, including the district-wide distribution of developmentally appropriate magazines with age-appropriate social-emotional-learning articles, mindfulness training for both adults and students, and community-based cultural events. Students will receive yearlong subscriptions to these magazines and are allowed to take them home to share with family. Teachers and staff will be trained in mindfulness techniques to support student leaders in learning and teaching others about mindfulness. Student leaders will receive stipends for teaching mindfulness during summer school programs. Community-based events will honor students' and families' cultural heritage, promoting a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Communities in Schools of Central Washington is involved in eight school districts across Yakima County, including two full-service community schools and two schools who operate on the homelands of the Yakama Nation. Their core approach for youth mental wellness is for Harmony Academy to provide teachers with professional learning and curriculum resources in social-emotional learning, such that teachers will incorporate these resources into school curricula, supporting healthy relationships both inside and outside the classroom.

Providing paid internship opportunities for students to research and develop their own youth wellness projects promotes the idea that young people possess inherent wisdom about what their communities would benefit from. Funding allows for these projects to be completed, which further demonstrates the importance of community involvement in improving youth wellness.

In addition, YVPE has made an in-kind contribution of 10 iPads to YVC to support its efforts to establish a better baseline of student wellness by providing a more convenient means of surveying students at its campuses (Yakima and Grandview) and learning centers (Toppenish and Ellensburg). Survey data will inform actions to strengthen student social-emotional health with a focus on culturally-appropriate supports that enhance college success.



*Photos courtesy of Yakima Valley Partners for Education*



## Renton

The core strategy for RIZP's youth wellness zone is implementation of the W.E.B. (Where Everybody Belongs) program at Dimmitt Middle School. RIZP conducted a summer learning program survey with parents and youth, to which many students highlighted the importance of having a friend, particularly when entering a new situation. The goal of W.E.B. will be to connect incoming students with a trusted friend and ally as they begin middle school. At least two Dimmitt staff will be identified as program coordinators and extensively trained by the Boomerang Project. When attending these training programs, community members noted that several community-building activities would not fit the demographic of these students; therefore, those activities were adjusted to fit the interest and culture of this community. Eighth grade W.E.B. leaders (current 7th graders) will be recruited, selected, and trained to facilitate the W.E.B. orientation for 6th graders and new students. Eighth grade student mentors will also provide monthly group check-ins and hangouts with their 6th grade mentees during the 2025-2026 school year. The goal of these mentee-mentor relationships is to enhance the sense of belonging and overall wellbeing for incoming 6th graders. The orientation allows them to become familiar with the school layout, connect with fellow incoming 6th graders and 8th grade W.E.B. leaders, meet school staff, and participate in group activities.

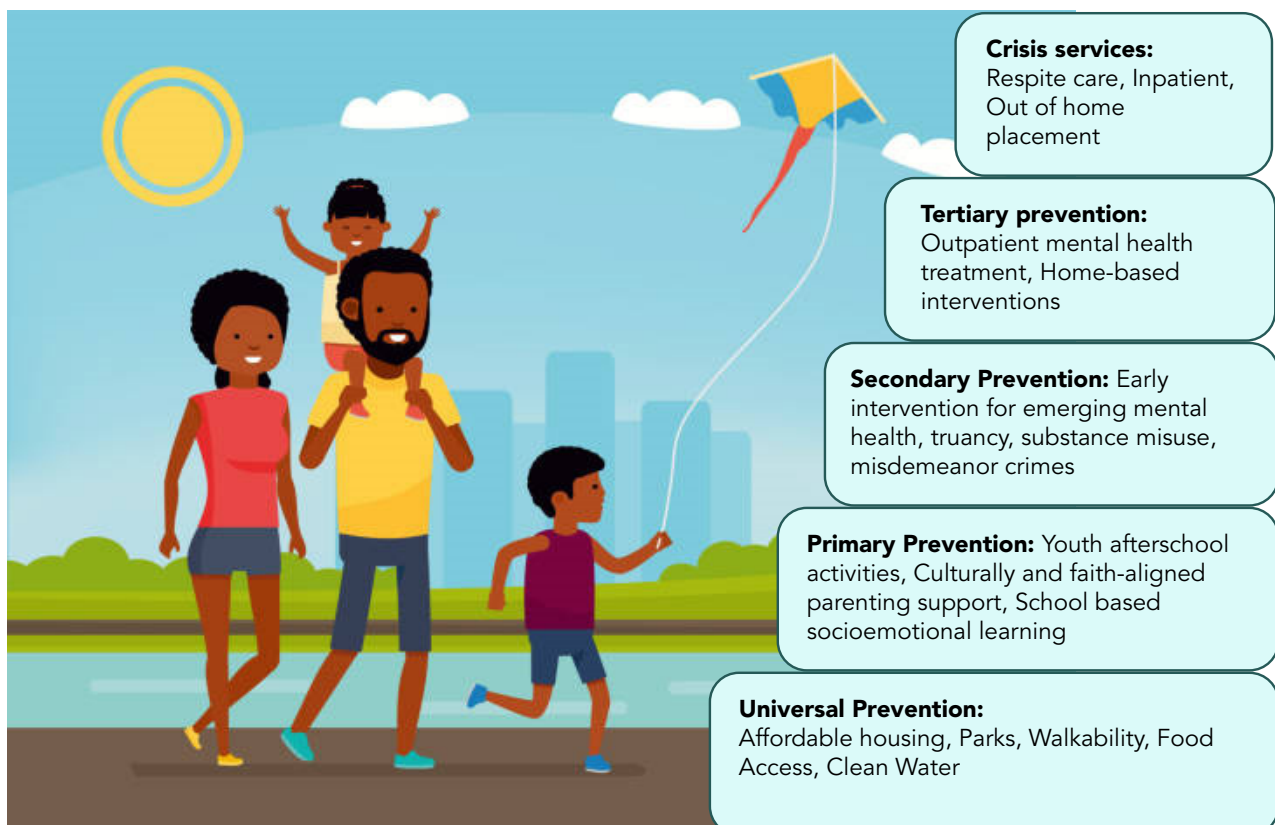


*Photo courtesy of Renton Innovation Zone Partnership*

## Greater Parkland

The core strategy to positively impact youth wellness in Greater Parkland is KMHPC's implementation of a three-tiered behavioral health system, piloted at Keithly Middle School. Through this pilot, students will be screened for behavioral health challenges (early identification), referred to a community multidisciplinary team (composed of at least one mental health professional, community behavioral health providers, and local advocates) meeting to assist with case coordination and planning, and provided brief intervention by a YES clinician in the school until the student is connected with outside providers and community supports. KMHPC plans to develop a network of local providers to ensure timely triage and connection to resources. This approach will allow students to be identified earlier than they otherwise would have been. Early intervention is key to preventing behavioral health symptoms from getting worse. Connection with the YES clinician at school will allow students to receive support as a bridge while appropriate referrals are made and community-based services are initiated. There is typically a long wait time to be seen by mental and behavioral health specialists, so relationship with the YES clinician at school will allow students to receive treatment as they wait. Community collaboration with providers and youth voice have been key in determining specific needs, developing new programs, and identifying existing resources. Students and families will be involved in multidisciplinary team meetings and community summits. Students will also aid in development of a Greater Parkland zone website and newsletter.

## Ecological Approach







## LOOKING FORWARD

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A core focus of the state-funded Youth Wellness Zone learning collaborative is defining and measuring impact outcomes informed by local communities and of interest to wider policy and national communities interested in place-based approaches to health. Below are early examples of outcomes of interest to local communities around youth mental health and wellness. The evaluation approach and findings will be the subject of future briefs and communications.

*Photo courtesy of Parkland Wellness Zone*



## Northeast Spokane

The Northeast Spokane ZONE strategy will foster community connection through youth outreach and information gathering (with both peers and neighborhood families). Workshops provided by existing youth-serving organizations will connect students with positive adults in their neighborhoods. Students will further engage with leaders in their communities and establish relationships as they report their findings and share wellness priorities. The ZONE strategy will directly impact student mental wellness by engaging and mobilizing young people in all phases of the project (need identification, planning, development, proposal, and implementation). Elevating youth voice is likely to improve self-esteem, self-efficacy, and lead to a sense of pride and mastery in their accomplishments. The secondary impact on youth mental health will result from development and implementation of student-identified wellness priorities.

## Yakima Valley

The Yakima Valley zone strategies will lead to greater sense of belonging within these communities through increased knowledge of and ability to support social-emotional wellness. Although specific strategies differ across districts, each will lead to increased awareness, empathy, and understanding of mental and social health among students. This empowers youth to better understand themselves and others. The hope is that students will bring these learnings home and share with family members. Granger School District's approach will specifically improve the ability to identify mental health challenges within themselves and others, thus increasing the likelihood that students will seek help and encourage others to do the same. Mabton School District's focus on teaching mindfulness strategies is likely to decrease anxiety, improve mind-body-awareness, and provides an opportunity for students to build mastery in this area by becoming a student leader, helping others learn new skills. Community events will bring families and students together, providing time to support each other and build a sense of shared experience and belonging. Incorporation of social-emotional learning with Communities in Schools will decrease stigma around mental health, as it becomes a key element within the school environment. Much of this learning is centered around improving relationships, which will likely decrease conflict both in school and at home, contributing to a greater sense of overall wellbeing and safety. Interns' ability to have their voices heard and their ideas carried to fruition will increase self-efficacy and wellbeing. YVC's campus wellness initiative is part of an overarching effort to foster lasting culture change on campus by providing holistic supports that contribute to the academic and professional success of students, in particular Latino students, as YVC is a federally-designated Hispanic Serving Institution. In addition to collecting data on student social-emotional wellness, iPads are being used in related initiatives to enhance student leadership skills and financial aid literacy, which contribute to student persistence and achievement.

## Renton

The Renton youth wellness zone strategy, W.E.B., will enhance student wellbeing through increased feelings of belonging and community for incoming 6th graders at Dimmitt Middle School. This strategy will foster continued connection among incoming students and 8th grade W.E.B. leaders through ongoing monthly group check-ins and hangouts. Skills developed through W.E.B. trainings and activities will directly improve youth mental health by increasing empathy, providing shared experiences, improving interpersonal skills, and promoting opportunities to build friendships. W.E.B. is likely to not only positively influence 6th graders' sense of wellness, but also improve 8th grade mentors' wellbeing as they make a positive impact on the younger students. Research has long shown that kindness towards others is beneficial to all involved. Eighth grade W.E.B. students are also likely to become leaders within their school, and 6th graders will have the opportunity to themselves become W.E.B. leaders in the future. RIZP will assess student responses to school climate surveys the year following implementation to determine whether scores improved in students' feelings of community (e.g., "At this school, students talk about the importance of understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others;" "I feel like I belong at this school;" "I feel like I am part of a caring community at my school"). Additionally, RIZP will work upstream to gather feedback from elementary students and their families to better define wellness and create strategies to further enhance student wellbeing upon transition to middle school. This feedback will be incorporated into future W.E.B. iterations. A sustainability plan for ongoing funding will also be established so that the W.E.B. program can continue.

## Parkland

The Greater Parkland wellness zone strategy will allow for early identification and intervention for students with mental and behavioral health challenges. Early in development, youth, families, providers, and youth-facing organizations gathered to identify existing resources, needs, and develop additional supports. Development of a closed-loop, rapid referral system will allow young people to be linked with appropriate services to address their needs before they reach crisis, which is often when youth are first connected with services. Early intervention will help prevent ongoing issues and connections to community supports in addition to treatment will allow youth to thrive in their environments. Utilizing multidisciplinary team meetings and including families in these will help identify the best resources and options available and will ensure culturally appropriate care. Team approaches are also known to improve quality of experience and support a feeling of inclusion and belonging. Creating connections across various supports will allow youth and families to feel fully supported. Development of a thoughtful, comprehensive system also helps ensure no youth fall through the cracks. Overall, this strategy will create connection in the community across youth, families, providers, and organizations, allowing for a broader support network and increased sense of confidence that the neighborhood can and will support youth and families.





## SUMMARY

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Youth wellness zones are a promising approach to improving child and adolescent mental wellbeing that state and local governments would be well-advised to consider as part of other healthcare, school and sector-specific investments. By mobilizing community members and organizations, neighborhood insights and wisdom are applied to solve complex social problems. The four zones in this initiative, Northeast Spokane, Yakima Valley, Renton, and Greater Parkland, have identified wellness needs specific to their neighborhoods by gathering feedback and ideas from members of those very communities. Involving youth in civic planning and place-based innovation centers their voices and community connection to both directly and indirectly improve their wellbeing. Youth and families in these zones have been pivotal in planning, strategizing, and taking action to address their unique mental and behavioral wellness needs. Data regarding child and adolescent wellbeing will continue to be collected from each of the four wellness zones to inform next steps and provide valuable information about functionality and practicality of applying place-based collective impact strategies to improve youth wellness.

*Photo courtesy of Renton Innovation Zone Partnership*



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