

## KELSEYVILLE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT




# Improving Access to Mental Health Support for Rural Students



### KELSEYVILLE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Kelseyville is a small rural community situated in Northern California with a population of just over 3,600. Kelseyville Unified School District (KVUSD) serves 2,000 students. Post-pandemic, KVUSD realized that their students, staff, and parents were facing a slew of mental health challenges, which were directly attributed to being shut down for essentially one year.

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### Challenge

A rural county school district discovered a rise in mental health challenges following the pandemic shutdown.

### Solution

The district turned to Gaggle Therapy and Coaching services to alleviate accessibility issues for their students in an effort to treat them more effectively.

### Results

Eliminating barriers that traditional in-person therapy brings—like cost, insurance, waitlists, and availability of providers—the district was able to provide access to immediate help for struggling students.

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Being in a rural area presents its own unique set of challenges, one of which is limited access to health professionals. While the district does rely on school counselors for academic planning and counseling, they don't specifically address the mental health needs of students. The district also employs two psychologists, however handling the growing needs of 2,000 students presents a bandwidth challenge.

**“You could tell that during this time, there was a lot lost. Not only from people who lost their lives from the virus, but connections that were no longer being made because we simply weren't around people. We saw a social/emotional loss with a lot of our students coming back. It was apparent, too, that even our staff was experiencing issues.”**

**DR. DAVE MCQUEEN, SUPERINTENDENT**



All of these circumstances—coupled with the reality that for many school families, cost was a barrier—are what ultimately led to the district seeking out other solutions.

“Eighty percent of our students are on free or reduced lunch, and they wouldn’t be able to afford care. We just didn’t have the ability to get this type of counseling to students.”

Dr. McQueen shares that they began exploring options for solutions to finding appropriate care for their students and staff, but there were key factors that prevented them from being able to bring this type of help to students.

“Just trying to find the adequate number of professionals we needed that were certified, it would cost us over half a million dollars, minimum, in order to be able to hire a certified counselor in the mental health space. But an equally difficult issue was finding them to hire them. Rural areas are losing their hospitals and physicians. There just was no vehicle to bring enough help to 2,000 students and families. It just wasn’t there.”

Because KVUSD was already a trusted Gaggle partner who was utilizing Gaggle Safety Management across its school issued devices, Dr. McQueen shared that being introduced to Gaggle Therapy and Coaching was exactly what they needed, even as kids were still in remote learning environments in the state of California.

**“Gaggle Therapy was perfect because it allowed all of our students to remain in Zoom, while giving them the privacy of being able to engage in therapy at home. It was a perfect fit for us because we could service ALL of our students. And, Gaggle provided enough**

**therapists so that students could access them. There is just no way we could bring that to our students on our own.”**

The district found that relying on Gaggle Therapy proved helpful in two slightly different ways. One was for students experiencing any sort of mental health crisis or trauma. Students were able to receive teletherapy for pandemic related stress, as well as family problems, or any other related issue where help was needed.

The second area in which the district experienced success with the program was on the behavioral side. When a student is expelled or suspended from one of the schools, the district mandates that they receive some form of counseling. Having Gaggle Therapy as a resource, the students were able to engage in some form of counseling quickly and seamlessly.

“We did see results in the sense that it helped with some of the behaviors we were seeing. Students finally had someone to talk to and help they could access, whereas before they did not,” said McQueen.

In taking a closer look at the profound results the district was seeing, Dr. McQueen recalls a success story about a student who was involved in a fight with another student at school, and was ultimately expelled. The school then mandated that they engage in five sessions through Gaggle Therapy. The outcome of those sessions proved to be quite impactful for the student. “She developed such a positive relationship with the therapist and made a complete turnaround. She came back after her expulsion period and she is now thriving,” McQueen said.

Gaggle Therapy has proved to be a game changer for KVUSD students and families, particularly for those who had no access to counseling. Students who are in need can receive support almost immediately.

"I received countless 'thank yous' and notes of appreciation from parents for providing the ability to access help. We had all of these students who needed to see someone and it would take months, literally, to get an appointment. That kind of resource just doesn't exist in our county."

District counselors and psychologists also loved that Gaggle Therapy and Coaching was being offered. They were seeing gains and improvements with students, and that was reassuring. Having Gaggle Therapy in place also relieved their caseloads, ensuring that all students who needed the help were able to get it, rather than experiencing a delay due to long wait times.

Dr. McQueen shared that as a district, they are always looking for resources and tools they can provide in order to help students succeed. "Gaggle Therapy is simply another tool in our bag that we as educators can use to help students. The more that we have to offer students, the better it is," McQueen said.

**"Before Gaggle Therapy, I couldn't help every kid. I feel like now I can help every kid. I've got something for every kid and it's well worth it. It makes sense financially and emotionally. I wouldn't hesitate giving my recommendation for this program at all."**