

The Palo Alto
PROMISE



PALO ALTO
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
CHAMPIONS OF EXCELLENCE

Annual Report

JUNE 2025

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Palo Alto Unified School District

At a Glance

10,207



Students Enrolled

1,607



High Quality Staff

15 to 1



Student to Teacher
Ratio

\$33,988



Per-Pupil
Spending

#1

Ranked Unified School
District in California
by Niche

1M⁺
Million

Over one million
meals served

100%



Access to arts, music,
and library instructional
programs

#1

Ranked best places
to teach in Bay Area
by Niche

39



National Board Certified
Teachers

120⁺



Career Pathway
Electives

\$5M
Million

Raised by PiE to
support our
students

AAA



Moody's and S&P
General Obligations
Bond Ratings

Superintendent Austin's Message



As we reflect on our progress and chart our path forward, I am proud to share the 2024-25 PAUSD Promise Annual Report as a snapshot of our commitment to excellence, innovation, and student-centered growth. Palo Alto Unified continues to be recognized as one of the nation's premier school districts and the top-ranked K-12 district in California. These outcomes are the result of a focused strategy, strong partnerships, and a community that places education at the forefront.

The PAUSD Promise was introduced in 2019-20 as a clear, purpose-driven framework that prioritizes depth over breadth. Grounded in five key areas, our efforts are designed to be consistent, measurable, and impactful:

- **Equity and Excellence** – Making meaningful gains in closing gaps and elevating outcomes for all students.
- **Innovation** – Launching bold initiatives like Middle College High School and exploring new models of learning.
- **Literacy** – Leading California in reading growth for two consecutive years, with continued momentum.
- **Mental Health and Wellness** – Expanding and embedding supports to strengthen community well-being.
- **Serve and Celebrate Others** – Fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation.

These pillars reflect our ongoing belief that stability in priorities enables long-term, systemic progress. This year's report also marks a transition in District governance. We extend appreciation to our prior Board of Education for their steady leadership and vision, and we welcome the engagement of our current Board members as we continue this important work. The 2024-25 PAUSD Promise Annual Report will serve as a critical resource as the current Board considers refinements and evolves the plan for the coming year.

Our journey is grounded in continuous improvement, collective ownership, and a belief in the extraordinary potential of every student. We remain deeply grateful to our educators, staff, families, and community partners who make our progress possible.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we are building a school district that reflects the highest ideals in public education.

Donald B. Austin, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Equity & Excellence

Achieving significant strides in supporting previously underserved students, ensuring success for all.

The Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT Plan) is a strategy designed to bring about meaningful changes in PAUSD to promote educational equity and prioritize diversity, inclusion, and fairness throughout the entire educational system. This plan supports the success of all students and staff while placing special emphasis on gathering and analyzing information about outcomes, policies, and practices that may disproportionately affect students of color, those with disabilities, and students from low-income or traditionally underserved backgrounds.

Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

- 120+ high school students received guidance and support throughout the college application process from Collegewise.
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teachers from five secondary schools participated in three-day summer training.
- 100% of secondary sites received training on the implementation of evidence-based grading practices.
- A research-based, culturally responsive principal walkthrough tool was introduced to principals and Multicultural Affairs Liaisons for initial review and refinement.
- Provided monthly training to Multicultural Affairs Liaisons in Culturally Responsive Practices.
- Established a partnership with Learn Academy, a leading Autism Support Program, to conduct an audit of programs and services for students with extensive needs.
- 221 staff members trained and certified in Safety Care, supporting student behaviors.

School Community & Family Partnerships and Engagement

- Wellness events held included topics such as anxiety, executive functioning, and trauma-informed parenting.
- Established a new Special Education District Advisory Committee.
- Relaunched Special Education Newsletter.
- Hosted five Special Education Town Halls and listening sessions to inform PAUSD's 10-Point Strategy for Special Education Improvement.
- Parent workshops covered topics including Individualized Education Plan (IEP) navigation, behavior strategies, academic support, and mental health, including The Parent Project.



68.5%

68.5% of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in general classrooms.

86%

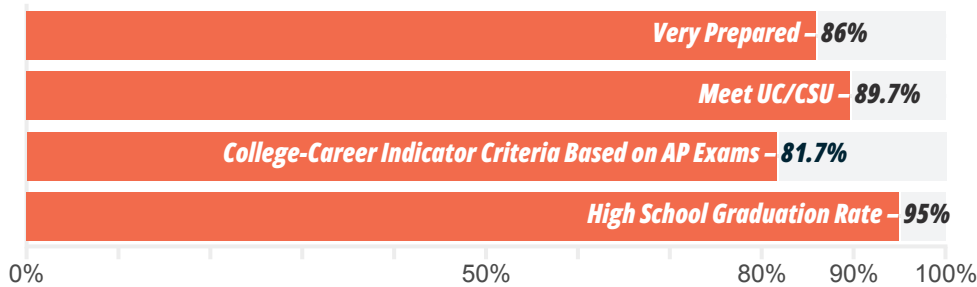
86% of students were rated "Very Prepared" on the CA Dashboard, with notable increases of 6-12% in key student groups, including SED, EL, Hispanic and Students with Disabilities.



Tiered Student Supports and Interventions

- Targeted interventions, tracked through Panorama, increased from 301 to 559 since 2023-24.
- 86% of students were rated “Very Prepared” on the CA Dashboard, with notable increases of 6-12% in key student groups, including SED, EL, Hispanic and Students with Disabilities since 2023-24.
- Tier 1 student supports surged from 73 to 1,434, highlighting enhanced universal support efforts since 2023-24.
- 1,020 completed intervention plans across the District resulted in students meeting their progress monitoring goals.

College-Career Readiness Achievements



Positive School Climate and Belonging

- Chronic absenteeism decreased by 3.2% overall.
- Administered surveys to over 4,000 secondary students, with over 70% student participation.
- 95% of principals completed training on immediate response strategies to hate speech and discrimination.
- Launched and shared bullying and harassment resources, along with a centralized digital reporting tool, on District and school websites.
- Delivered awareness presentations on bias and microaggressions in classrooms and assemblies.
- Race-based incidents decreased by approximately 32.5% compared to 2023-24.
- 100% of race-based incidents in 2024-25 were addressed with school site administrators.

Future Focus ▶▶

Implement targeted interventions to address chronic absenteeism for student subgroups that didn't meet **Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT)** goals.

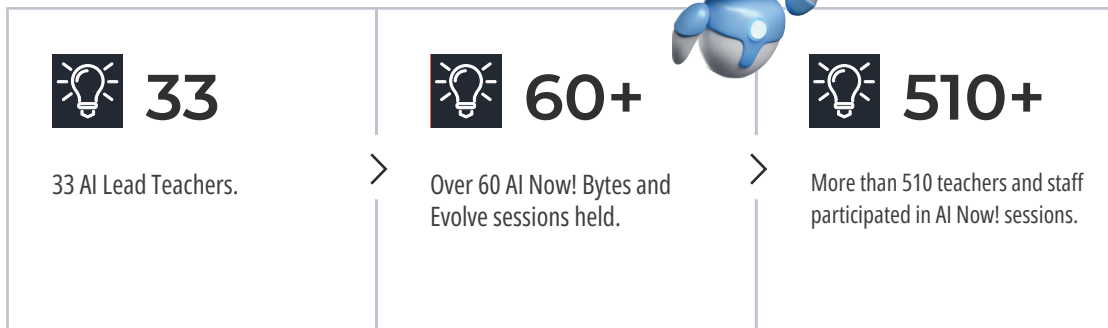


Innovation

Empowering futures: expanding opportunities, inspiring innovation, and elevating success.

PAUSD aims to inspire all TK-12 students to become independent, lifelong learners equipped with the skills, confidence, and self-awareness required for personal growth. We promote an educational approach that prepares students for a self-sufficient life, thoughtful self-reflection, and heightened social awareness. By focusing on instructional choices, such as curriculum, teaching methods, grading practices, and fostering a sense of belonging, we strive to establish learning environments that encourage students to discover their passions while nurturing their creativity and innovation through self-guided learning and intrinsic motivation.

Enduring Skills



Curriculum & Instruction

- 100% of students have access to standards-aligned instructional materials.
- 100% of sites passed the Williams Compliance review, supporting access to instructional materials and facilities.
- PAUSD Induction Consortium supported 31 new teachers.
- To build foundational skills for collaborative instruction, 30 teachers completed co-teaching training, and 28 secondary teachers participated in peer observation rounds focused on co-teaching strategies.
- Palo Alto Middle College High School opened as PAUSD's third high school and is currently undergoing accreditation with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).
- PAUSD was awarded two grants, totaling approximately \$1.8M, from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to fund a Teacher Residency Program.
- The Co-Teaching Professional Learning Community refined practices, shared insights, and implemented effective co-teaching models to foster inclusive classrooms and improve student outcomes.

Partnerships

- 10+ community partnerships supported student engagement and expanded real-world learning opportunities.
- Celebrated the 30-year anniversary of the Palo Alto Safe Routes to School partnership with the City of Palo Alto and the Palo Alto PTA, which supports approximately 5,888 students per year.



100%

Art & Music Education

- 100% of K-5 students participate in art, music, and physical education.
- All 12 elementary schools have updated musical instruments and art supplies.

Creativity Cart Program

- Elementary schools participated in the Creativity Cart program, with students engaging in over 12,000 hands-on creativity kit experiences throughout the year.

12K+

85%

Civic Engagement Graduating

- 85% of students graduated with the Seal of Civic Engagement.

Dual Enrollment

- Over 400 students enrolled in dual enrollment courses earning college credit in partnership with Foothill College.

400+

4K+

Career & Technical Education Pathways

- Over 4,000 students participated in diverse courses more than 10 CTE pathways, providing students with opportunities for hands-on learning and career preparation.

Future Focus ▶▶

Expanding opportunities for all staff to engage in professional learning around AI literacy.

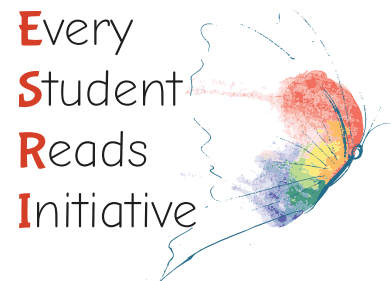


Literacy



Leading California in reading growth for two consecutive years; a testament to our commitment to foundational skills.

Every Student Reads Initiative (ESRI) strives to reach the goal of ALL students reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3. Resources align with an “all in” approach to address early literacy. Students who enter Grade 4 at or above grade level are best prepared for future success. All students reading competently by Grade 4 will change their trajectory.



Growing Readers Transforming Lives

Focus on ESRI Groups and Student Progress Monitoring

- Updated progress indicators to reflect meaningful, aligned classroom instruction tailored to individual student needs, aimed to improve reading proficiency through a multifaceted approach that emphasized teacher collaboration, data-driven instructional planning, and intensive literacy-focused professional learning.
- Reviewed progress and goals for ESRI groups at monthly principal meetings.
- Principals observed teachers and provided feedback to ensure adherence to District-adopted curricula and methodologies.
- Expanded literacy walkthroughs to calibrate instructional practices.
- Teachers used multiple assessment tools (OG, BAS, i-Ready) to monitor and guide instruction.
- Ongoing analysis of assessment data at monthly principal and District meetings.
- Principals shared growth data with staff at meetings, Site Councils, and community events.

Intervention and Support for Struggling Readers

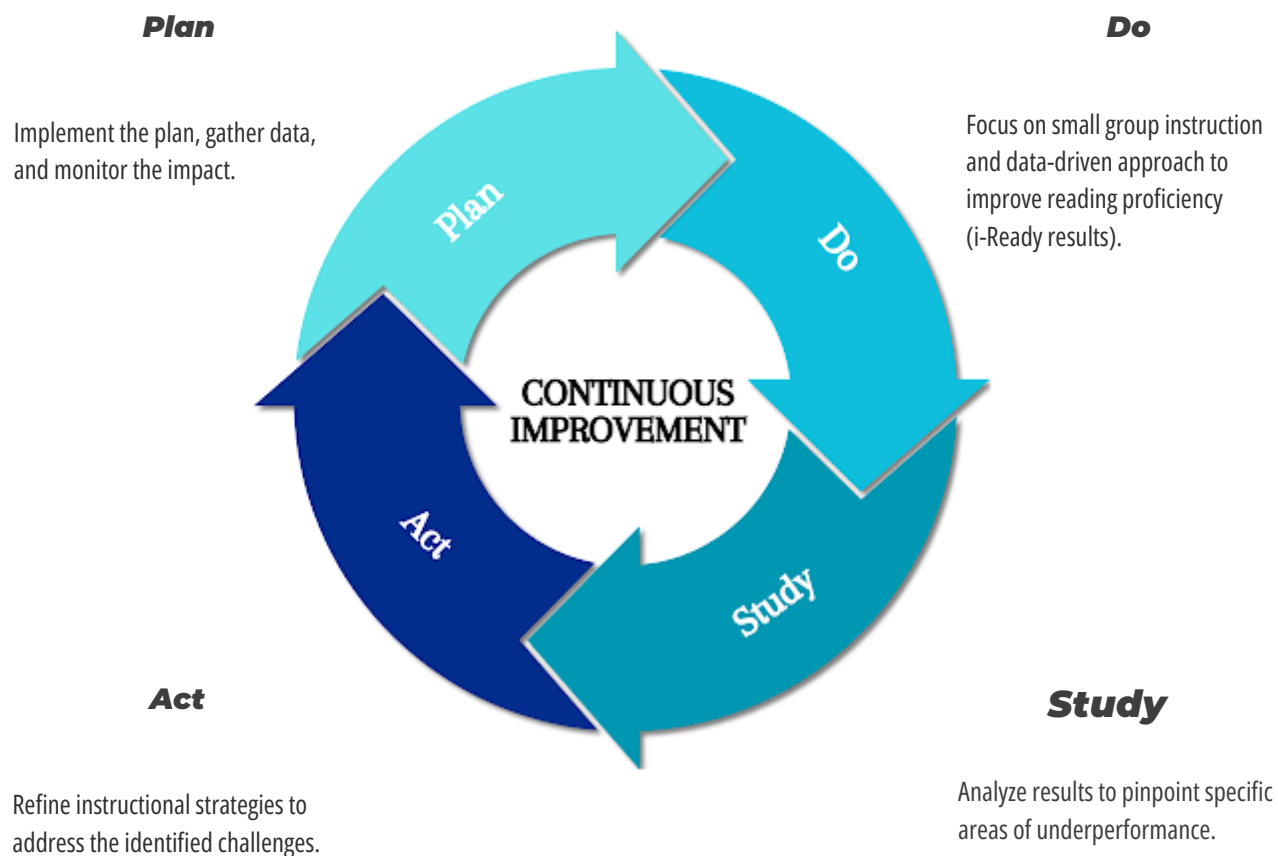
- Over 100 teachers trained in the Reading Apprenticeship program.
- Promise Goal evolved from Early Literacy to TK-12 Literacy.
- Focused on small-group instruction and data-driven approach.
- Reading specialists collaborated with teachers to provide targeted intervention.
- Site Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) teams used data to identify students needing additional support.

Oral Language and Vocabulary Development

- Vocabulary and oral language skills were identified as areas for intensive focus based on data analysis.
 - Oral language and vocabulary development were prioritized in principal collaboration meetings.
 - March 2025 Professional Learning Day focused on oral language and vocabulary development.



Data-informed decisions shape instructional adjustments and interventions



Future Focus ►►

Implement evidence-based vocabulary instruction to increase reading comprehension across all grade levels and content areas.

Mental Health & Wellness

Expanding supports for students and staff, enhancing our community's well-being.

PAUSD strives to provide for the social, emotional, and physical health needs of all students, staff, and families. Our goal is to cultivate positive, identity-safe school environments that promote high levels of connection, resilience, and overall well-being throughout the school community.



Mental Health

- Wellness Centers fully operational at all secondary sites.
- Mental Health Providers increased from 13 (2022-23) to 22 (2024-25) across 17 schools.
- 115 drop-in therapy sessions and 2,245 visits to high school Wellness Centers.
- Over 2,200 students enrolled in tbh Virtual Counseling.
- Recorded 591 formal therapy referrals across all schools.
- 72% of families felt therapy met their child's needs.
- Behavioral Emergency Response Teams (BERTs) established at 12 elementary sites.
- 340+ mental health support sessions provided to staff.
- Distributed monthly staff mental health newsletter.
- Number of students on therapy waitlists dropped from 85 (2022-23) to 28 (2024-25).
- 100% of surveyed staff felt heard and respected in staff mental health sessions.



90%

90% of families expressed high satisfaction with their child's therapist.

86%

86% of secondary students feel supported.

87%

87% of elementary students feel supported

85+%

Over 85% of students report having a trusted adult/friend.



Well-Being

- Teen mental health training offered to high school students equipped them with skills to support peers in crisis.
- Mental health lessons and training offered to students during the Personal Reteaching, Intervention, Mentoring, Enrichment (PRIME) period.
- Adopted social-emotional curriculum (Wayfinder) for secondary students.
- Adopted social-emotional curriculum (Second Step) for elementary students.
- Students across 12 elementary schools participated in Productive Play sessions.
- Over 500 students engaged in self-help resources provided by tbh.
- Emotion regulation scores improved by 6-8 percentage points.
- Established a student mental health advisory group for high schools.



Physical Health

- 4,245+ hearing and vision screening tests administered.
- 95.3% mid-year school attendance rate reported.
- Monitored weekly attendance using the SchoolStatus platform and updated attendance teams and administrators on students of concern.
- Monthly meeting established between Student Services, Registration Services, and Health Services to review excessive excused absences to identify trends, assess the impact of current interventions, and develop strategies to improve student attendance.
- School Attendance Review Board (SARB) meetings held after two truancy letters.
- Over 10,000 health office visits were documented.
- Grab-N-Go Emergency Guide made available in every classroom.
- District's Let's Talk platform provided a channel for students to report safety concerns and for students and the community to provide feedback on emergency preparedness.
- Provided summer internships to high school students supporting PAUSD's safety and emergency preparedness efforts.

Future Focus ▶▶

Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programs aimed at improving students' emotion regulation skills.



Serve & Celebrate Others



Fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation.

The staff and students of PAUSD will evolve as a community of “Builders” through investing in service and celebrations on behalf of others. PAUSD will positively impact peers, colleagues, and the broader community through human interaction and connections free of judgment and full of joy. Programs, groups, and individuals will be routinely celebrated for building people up through their actions, words, and kindness. Our shared commitment to celebrating our “Builders” will allow for multiple layers of people to contribute at every level.



Student Celebrations

- Elementary schools celebrated students with programs like “Caught You” tickets (Hoover), “High Fives” (Walter Hays), “Take Pride” (Addison), and “PAWS” (JLS).
- Celebrated the 12 elementary student finalists whose recipes were selected to participate in the annual Future Chefs Challenge.
- PAUSD secondary schools' Career-Themed Pathways were celebrated at the Career Technical Education Showcase highlighting student projects. NAF also recognized several of PAUSD's CTE courses for their commitment to preparing future-ready students.
- Hosted Special Olympics, Best Buddies, Unity Day, Neurodiversity, and other events to create inclusive environments.



Students Serving Others

- Secondary schools gave back through service projects such as Paly's POWER MOVES fundraiser to support Southern California fire victims (Paly), the Focus On Success program that collected over 300 pairs of socks and crafted 100 heartfelt Valentine's notes for LA fire victims (Gunn), and the assembly of Creativity Cart kits to inspire innovation in elementary schools (PAMC).
- All sites served the community with over 150 Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) performances.



Staff Celebrations

- PAUSD proudly hosted the 2025 Annual Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Sweetheart Awards Ceremony, honoring 62 outstanding nominees who have made a meaningful difference in the lives of students with special needs.
- PAUSD's Health Services Coordinator received the California School Nurses Organization's Excellence in School Nursing Administration Award.
- PAUSD's Information Technology team was recognized with the Laserfiche Run Smarter Award for "Laserfiche Team of the Year."



Future Focus »

Assess the impact of service and celebration activities on students' social-emotional development.



Glossary

Advanced Placement AP Exam: A standardized, college-level exam administered by the College Board to assess a student's mastery of the material covered in a corresponding AP course.

AVID: Advancement Via Individual Determination

CA Dashboard: An online tool that provides information about the performance of California schools and districts on state and local indicators, including those related to student achievement, college and career readiness, and equity.

Certifications: Verifications of skill or knowledge attainment based on generally-accepted skill standards for an occupation. PAUSD offers several certifications through its CTE programs.

CTE: Career and Technical Education

English Learner (EL): A student who is in the process of acquiring English language proficiency, developing their ability to listen, speak, read, and write in English to a level that allows them to succeed in an English-dominant classroom.

ELA: English Language Arts. Information to help students achieve progressive levels of mastery so that they may communicate effectively in English and, ultimately, participate fully in society and the world of work. ELA classes help students improve their listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills.

General Obligation Bond Ratings (S&P/Moody's): Rating systems to provide clarity around the components of credit risk.

IEP: Individualized Education Plan

Literacy: Literacy is a combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Early literacy refers to learners using these skills from Kindergarten through 5th grade.

Mental Health and Wellness Associates: Provide mental health support through group and 1:1 counseling, class presentations, parent and teacher consultation, site team collaboration, parent and staff psychoeducation.

Mental Health Contracted Providers:

tbh – provides secondary students with 24/7 individual and group virtual coaching sessions, parent education, bilingual therapists, and culturally inclusive supports, and connections to resources.

Care Solace – assists staff, students, and families in finding local mental health related programs and counseling services.

NAF: National Academy Foundation is an industry-sponsored nonprofit with a national network of public-private partnerships that support career academies within traditional high schools.

National Board Certified: National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education and provides numerous benefits to teachers, students, and schools.

Niche: Online resource providing information on K–12 schools, colleges, cities, neighborhoods, and companies across the United States.

OG: Orton-Gillingham methodology is a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive way to teach literacy when reading, writing, and spelling does not come easily to individuals, such as those with dyslexia.

Panorama Education: An education technology company that specializes in K-12 survey platforms. Panorama provides tools to help schools and districts gather and analyze feedback from students, families, teachers, and staff to understand school climate and improve student well-being and academic success.

Pathway: A pathway is defined as a two-to-three-year course sequence that consists of an introduction (optional), concentrator, and capstone courses, as determined by the CDE.

Per-Pupil Spending: The amount of money spent on education by a school district or the state, divided by the number of students educated. For most purposes in California, the number of students is determined by Average Daily Attendance (ADA). (EdSource)

PiE: Partners in Education

PTA: Parent Teacher Association

PTAC: Palo Alto Council of Parent Teacher Associations works with District staff, Board of Education, community partners, and PTAs at 17 schools to support the students and families.

SaFE: Student and Family Engagement. SaFE Specialists provide schoolwide support and resources to identified students and families.

SED: Acronym for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged.

SWIFT: Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) drives the PAUSD equity agenda.

Tiered Interventions:

Tier 1 interventions are high-quality classroom instruction, screening, and group interventions.

Tier 2 interventions are targeted interventions whose intensity varies across group size, frequency and duration of intervention, and level of training of the professionals providing instruction or intervention.

Tier 3 interventions are intensive interventions and include comprehensive evaluations, which may involve an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

TK: Transitional Kindergarten. Currently, children in California can enroll in Kindergarten if they turn 5 on or before September 1. Younger children born after that date will be eligible to enroll in TK.

Unity Day: Unity Day, started by PACER's* National Bullying Prevention Center as the signature event of National Bullying Prevention Month. It continues to grow every year as a tangible representation of the universal message that our society wants to promote kindness, acceptance and inclusion to prevent bullying. (*Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights)

Wellness Center: Wellness Centers provide safe, supportive environments on school campuses, where students can go to discuss a variety of issues – from depression, grief, self-esteem, family life and stress – to dating violence, sexual identity, and health needs. Through on-campus programming and community-based partnerships, students receive coordinated health education, assessment, counseling, and other support services to maximize student engagement and success.





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