



# NCYOJ's School Responder Model Podcast Series

## SCHOOL, FAMILY, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



### INTRODUCTION FROM ARIA JORDAN

This is Aria Jordan with Policy Research Associates and the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice. Once again, we're speaking with Drs. Jeff Vanderploeg and Jeana Bracey from the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut as part of our School Responder Model podcast series to discuss school, family, community partnerships. NCYOJ's Dr. Crystal Brandow will be moderating this discussion.

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#### **| Crystal Brandow:**

Today's topic is strengthening school, family, community partnerships and improving equity through the School Responder Model. The School Responder Model or SRM is a school-based behavioral health response model that seeks to disrupt unnecessary suspension, expulsion, and arrest for students, particularly those with unmet, under-met or unidentified behavioral health needs.

At the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice, or NCYOJ, when we talk about the School Responder Model, we talk about it having four core components, cross-systems collaboration, family and youth engagement, behavioral health response and implementation, and the creation of formal policies and structures. We're going to talk a little bit more about those core components today with Jeff and Jeana, who direct the School-Based Diversion Initiative or SBDI, which is Connecticut's version of an SRM. So Jeff and Jeana, thank you so much for joining me for another discussion. I'm excited to connect today and talk about school, family, community partnerships.

#### **| Jeff Vanderploeg:**

Thanks, Crystal. It's great to be here.

#### **| Jeana Bracey:**

Thank you for having us. We're excited to share our work.

#### **| Crystal Brandow:**

Wonderful. So Jeana, let's start off with a little bit of conversation around how the school, family, community partnership's approach fits into those four core components of the School Responder Model. Do you mind getting us started?

#### **| Jeana Bracey:**

Yeah, absolutely. So, as you mentioned, the School Responder Model includes four components. The first of these is family and youth engagement. So this piece of it is really to work directly with the families and the youth that are being served through this work to reduce barriers and to really improve outcomes by having them as active participants in the process. When we're talking about reducing those challenging behaviors and reducing the pathway between the school and the justice system, it's really having them engaged and at the forefront of helping to make some of those decisions that are impacting the youth directly.

So the second component is around behavioral health response and implementation. So this is what's critical in terms of what do you do instead of suspending, arresting, or expelling the students, particularly, as you mentioned, when a behavioral health need is identified or is present. So being able to really enhance screening and referral practices to identify what those behavioral health challenges are and identifying professional development opportunities for school staff so that they can better identify how those needs can be met and how to partner with others to make sure that those resources exist to get the needs met for those particular students.

So the third piece center around policies and formal structures. Here we're talking about developing a memorandum of agreement or memorandums of understanding between schools and other community-based providers and partners, and also working to redefine and enhance their discipline protocols within the school to incorporate more restorative justice practices and equity-focused principles that are going to better serve students rather than again, that punishment route.

So then the fourth component would be the cross-systems collaboration, and here is where the school, family, community partnerships are embedded and are critical in that it's not just the school, it's not just the family that's responsible, but it is this collaboration and coordination with other community partners that makes this effective.

So here, we're talking about law enforcement engagement. They might have school resource officers in the building, in the particular school building. Might work directly with officers in the community, particularly around behavioral health response to the school. We're also talking about behavioral health service providers.

So again, who are those resources in the community that can help meet those service needs and wrap around the family in terms of where those needs are, and other community supports that might be available alongside personnel in the school as well as the student and family. So the goal here is really how do we create a process of shared decision making and accountability so that it is a collaborative process. So it's together that these components really structure the foundation for that successful process and really facilitate the implementation of a robust School Responder Model to effectively meet the needs of students.

### **I Crystal Bradow:**

Thanks so much for that, Jeana, and the way that you talked about those really highlights how important they are in accomplishing this work. When I talk about School Responder Model, sometimes I talk about it through the lens of creating an ecosystem of support for the student and their family. I think the way you just discussed those four core components really highlights that and how the school, family, community partnerships piece fits into that. Jeff, can you talk with us a little bit about the benefits of establishing a school, family, community partnership approach within a School Responder Model?

### **I Jeff Vanderploeg:**

Certainly! I think first of all, it occurred to me as Jeana was talking, that when you talk about a school response model, it doesn't necessarily imply, and it shouldn't imply, that schools are on their own in implementing it, and that's really what the school, community, and family partnership is all about. It's really an acknowledgment that schools are not on their own, that they don't have to undertake this work on their own, and in fact, it will be a lot more effective if they don't.

So to answer your question about benefits, the first benefit, I think, is that it's going to be a lot more effective doing this work of SRM when you do it in partnership with all of the folks that Jeana mentioned earlier. That means both within your school, but also outside of your school and in your community. So inside the school, we're talking about bringing together diverse staff within your school. Teachers, administrators, school, resource officers, social workers, psychologists, people who have an insight into what student needs are and how best to engage them in learning and help them to avoid suspension, expulsion, and arrest.

Then outside the school, you're talking about family members, and we know from talking with schools over the years that engaging families can be some of the most challenging and difficult work that schools engage in. Nevertheless, we think it's really important in a School Responder Model for schools to be actively engaging families as part of their team and really doing it in an authentic way where they're sharing power and sharing decision-making, and also getting information from families because families and community members know a lot about what's happening out there in the community that could be impacting the things that you're seeing, even on an individual student level.

Having that information might help you to make different decisions about how to respond when you are faced with a disciplinary

issue that needs to be addressed. Then finally, as Jeana mentioned, when you talk about the community, that's also potentially a very diverse partnership that can come in and support this work.

So that might involve local law enforcement or a school resource officer if you have them in your building. It might also include faith-based or ministerial alliances. We've had conversations with faith-based organizations that care very much about issues around juvenile justice and school success. They can be excellent partners.

Certainly, in the School Responder Model, the behavioral health community is one of your most important partners, but even juvenile court judges can be very supportive of these kinds of efforts because they don't want to see low-level offenses appear in front of them in court, much of the time. They would prefer to see those kinds of issues dealt with as routine discipline matters as they typically can be, but also child welfare and even the business community.

So, making the point here that one of the major points of a school, family, community partnership or the major benefits is that by bringing these diverse partners together, you're going to be more effective in your work. It's going to be more sustainable because you will be achieving buy-in at multiple levels, and also I think another significant benefit is if you think about the cross-system nature of SRM, at minimum, you're talking about engaging behavioral health, the educational system, and the juvenile legal system and that can create significant opportunities for policymaking. When you bring those three distinct partners together, you can do some pretty exciting things at the policy level to ensure student success.

### **I Crystal Brandow**

Absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing those benefits, Jeff. When we look at the students or the young people who do make it in front of court judges, for example, research shows that students of color and students with disability are more likely to experience higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and thus arrest and make it into the legal system. They're disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline in schools.

So if done intentionally, how do you think that school, family, community partnerships, as an element of a School Responder Model, can function as a strategy for improving equity and addressing some of these disparities in school disciplinary practices? Jeana, do you have any thoughts you'd like to share on that?

### **I Jeana Bracey:**

Thank you, Crystal. This is a really important component of this work, and I think it's important to start with an acknowledgment of both explicit and implicit biases that come into play here. Oftentimes, in terms of on the implicit side, you even hear that schools may talk about students in terms of mental health kids and juvenile justice kids or justice system kids, and make that distinction in terms of how they view behavior or how they attribute causes of student behavior to being willful problem behavior rather than a behavioral health problem.

So this bias in terms of how it's approached from the beginning, how discipline and behavior challenges are approached from the beginning, really impacts the decision-making behavior of staff when those discipline incidents arise. So again, sometimes those biases can also include the staff's negative perception of the family.

The family may also have biases themselves due to general stigma about mental health, or particularly when they might've had their own negative experiences with schools or with the legal system or as service providers in the past. So you have all of these things happening in the background that often then come to the foreground when you're in a difficult situation or a crisis situation, or when you're getting to the point of a significant intervention.

So ultimately, the School Responder Model here can serve to reduce that discretionary decision-making along the school-justice pathway by really promoting better processing and outcomes throughout this system. So the goal is really thinking about how to be more consistent, how to be more structured, more appropriate, more restorative, and ultimately more equitable for youth and families by promoting an opportunity to collaborate throughout this decision-making process and support. Also, to promote that effective decision-making and to move that into action, it's really important to foster a shift in thinking among adults in the system.

So, we do this a lot of times through training opportunities, through professional development, and doing this in a way that's multidisciplinary in nature. So we want to involve these different partners in that process so that their school staff are working alongside police and other responders, particularly as behavioral health providers, and that there's inclusion

of training on racism, implicit bias, that those things are talked about directly, and that those patterns are identified in where there are challenges among a particular school or among a particular system.

Once you're able to identify those better, you can help correct those practices that might be discretionary or discriminatory. When we talk about the school, family, community partnership, again, the family is really critical here, and having a strong parent engagement focus can really help drive that accountability to looking very intently at the practices and changing those in a way that promotes equity. Thinking about keeping all children and particularly children of color, but all children engaged in the school and community is at the forefront here.

So looking at models that really support that, looking at treatment opportunities that embed that perspective is really critical. Again, if we're looking at treatment and support, overall, that's more effective than punishment for all children, but particularly children of color who are at higher risk of punitive and exclusionary measures, as you've pointed out, is so critical and prevalent in the research on this.

Last, I would just add that research also shows that youth excluded from learning environments often have longer-term negative outcomes, throughout adulthood even. So during the school years, they're looking at lower academic achievement, lower graduation rates, possibly higher involvement in the justice or legal systems. So by intervening and disrupting these school to justice pathways early, you can certainly strengthen that positive connection to the school and community and prevent these negative outcomes later in life.

### **I Crystal Brandow**

Thanks for that, Jeana, and that really connects with what Jeff was just speaking about—about what the right people at the table, the right collaborators and stakeholders involved. There are these opportunities to explore and change policies and procedures. So Jeana, when you're talking about having structured, consistent pathways and opportunities within the school, one of the ways in which that can happen is by having the collaborative team really explore what is happening and look at new ways to engage with students in a restorative response that takes into account adolescent development.

It takes into account mental health, trauma, behavioral health more broadly and really create decision-making tools that are consistent with supporting the student and, again, creating this ecosystem of support. So what you just shared ties very nicely to what Jeff was talking about as far as the importance of having folks at the table and the potential to shape policy. So thank you so much for that.

### **I Jeff Vanderploeg**

Crystal, as you were listing those things off, it also occurred to me, it explains why the training and professional development component of an SRM is so important because many of the things you just mentioned, restorative practices, behavioral health needs, trauma, those are not things that teachers and school administrators go to school for, and they don't routinely get extensive amounts of training once they have a job within a school district. So an SRM is offering new knowledge, new skills, and a new way of understanding student behavior from a different perspective. That is why it's such a critical component to include in this work.

### **I Crystal Brandow**

Absolutely. Thank you so much for adding that, Jeff. So like we've talked about, a major goal of the School Responder Model beyond reducing exclusionary discipline is connecting students with behavioral health needs to these school and community-based services. Making sure students who need clinical support have access to that support, referral to that support, and the pathway to getting that behavioral health assistance, whatever form that might take that meets the needs of the student, the family, and is an accessible and culturally relevant treatment pathway for them.

So again, while the School Responder Model was not created to address racial equity in school-based mental health services, this is elevating as a concern, rightfully as many schools are implementing School Responder Models across the country. So again, there are opportunities as schools choose to focus on equity as part of their implementation. There are ways to be intentional about addressing these disparities, not only in exclusionary discipline, but also in access to mental health care and mental health treatment and school-based services. Jeff, can you talk a little bit more about that?

### **I Jeff Vanderploeg**

Yeah. I think the question of why, why focus on equity in SRM? Why focus on racial justice within an SRM? It's a really important question. I think the very first answer to it is because we can see very clearly in the data that we have a problem, and it's not appropriate or ethical, or moral for us to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that that problem doesn't exist because we know that every state that collects data and reports data and information on suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates has evidence of racial, ethnic disproportionality.

So are we to just pretend that that doesn't exist and just implement an SRM without any attention to racial equity and racial justice? No, we can't do that. The data tells us we can't do that. So that is the number one reason. We have to pay attention to it within an SRM is because we just have an imperative to do so. The data is very, very, very clear on that.

The other thing we have had the benefit of and Jeana has had the benefit of, as well, over the years, is being able to participate at a systems-level here in the state of Connecticut, where we have the opportunity to look at data across the system in a lot of different ways. I'm thinking in particular of the work of our racial, ethnic disparities committees that have been in operation for a number of years, and they look at data disaggregated by race and ethnicity across the juvenile justice and exclusionary discipline continuum, but also across the children's behavioral health treatment continuum.

One of the insights from looking at that information over the years is that as students get older, the juvenile justice system, the deeper ends of the juvenile justice system, meaning detention facilities and incarceration tends to get disproportionately black and brown. The vast majority of kids who are in those systems tend to be African-American and Hispanic boys.

It's clear. It's clear in Connecticut. It's clear in many other places. Simultaneously, when you look at the deeper ends of the behavioral health system, and what I mean by that is inpatient facilities or residential treatment facilities. That system, as you get deeper into it tends to become more white. Now, why is that happening? Now, that's a complicated question, but is it because we think that there's differential prevalence rates of mental health conditions or differential rates of acuity of mental health conditions?

There's really not a strong science to back that that is the case. So what we have here is decisions that are being made at the individual and at the systems-level that are resulting in the outcomes that we're seeing, where the juvenile justice system is disproportionately black and brown, and the deeper ends of the children's behavioral health treatment system are disproportionately white.

So we have to pay attention to that. We have to make different decisions that are very intentional to ensure that we're being equitable and fair in the decisions that we make that impact the students' lives. So how do we do that in SRM? I think I mentioned it a few minutes ago, but the first thing is teachers and school administrators, and others in the community that surround and support these students, they need to have changed hearts and minds, and we need to offer them professional development and training opportunities to understand things like trauma, to understanding the impact of social determinants of health.

The impact of lack of access to healthcare and lack of access to mental health treatment and understanding how trauma and unmet mental health needs can impact social, emotional, and behavioral development across adolescents, and even into adulthood. That's a level of information and research and data that most teachers and school personnel who are making these disciplinary decisions have not had much exposure to in their educational background or even on the job training as teachers or school professionals.

The other thing that we do in SRMs is we offer up what Crystal referred to earlier as these decision support tools. So there's a reason that we incorporate behavioral health and trauma screening measures into SRM. The reason for that is that it gives you a very systematic way of collecting new information and data that can impact the decision you make or the disposition decision you make about what you do in response to that disciplinary issue you just witnessed in the hallway.

If you know that a student has screened positive for having experienced multiple traumas over the last year, for example, or have screened positive for an anxiety condition or depression, you know that that student is in need of further assessment and possible treatment and that simply excluding them from normative environments like schools, which can be a tremendous support for all students, but particularly for students who are at risk in many other ways, you can make a



different decision.

You can engage the treatment system now instead of engaging the punitive exclusionary discipline system, which by the way, doesn't work very well. Oftentimes, when we have talked to schools about the use of exclusionary discipline like suspension, expulsion, and arrest, I think there's a belief that those responses are going to be effective in deterring students from exhibiting disciplinary issues in the future and then, as a result, they won't be suspended or expelled or experience other negative outcomes down the road, and the research and the data doesn't really back that up.

We know that access to mental health services and supports and increasing health and wellbeing in young people, and giving them positive developmental activities and alternatives can be much more effective. Restorative practices as a form of accountability can be much more effective than just simply removing a student from school.

So in a nutshell, offering something to a student that's going to be helpful as opposed to just removing something, that being participation in school, is much more effective. So let's do the things that we know work, and that's the reason we incorporate some of those systematic supports into an SRM. I think that last piece is something I want to spend just another couple of seconds on.

Sometimes we hear from folks out in the community who may not understand or support an SRM type approach that the idea is that we're just not holding students accountable anymore. "So what? Now if students misbehave, we're just going to say, 'Well, sorry that this happened, but go back to class.'" That's not at all what an SRM is about. It's about identifying underlying needs and addressing those underlying needs, but also, it's not absent of accountability.

One of the reasons a few years ago that we incorporated restorative practices into our approach was to be able to respond to that and say, "We may not be suspending or expelling nearly as much anymore, but we are going to offer restorative practices as an alternative accountability approach, and we're going to find that that's going to be much more successful in deterring the behavioral incident down the road from occurring."

### **I Crystal Bradow**

Thanks, Jeff. You mentioning how in Connecticut, you integrated restorative practices into your approach really speaks to this idea that the School Responder Model is a framework and schools and communities adapt the framework based on their needs, their strengths, their resources, their limitations, to see what will work best to fit the needs of their community. So as far as connecting students with behavioral health needs to these school and community services and supports, Jeana, can you walk us through, broadly, what that looks like and maybe how some of that flows in Connecticut?

### **I Jeana Bracey**

Sure. I think one thing I want to start with and acknowledge is that this process does require schools to be vulnerable and to be very introspective, and really be honest with themselves about where their strengths are, where their challenges are, where the breakdowns are in the system, and that's not easy. That's not an easy place to get to, or it's not comfortable to think about where are we not doing a great job and where do we need to improve. Particularly when you add on that layer of talking about bias or talking about reducing inequities and disparities that are documented, sometimes that can be daunting.

So one of the first steps into getting into this process is really a readiness assessment. It's about where are we as a unit, the school, the community, the partnership in terms of being able to address this and take this on at this moment?

Do we have the need, do we have some of that data and information to show us that there's a challenge here to address, and do we have the interest? Do we have a team who is dedicated to this common goal of really thinking about how do we reduce juvenile arrests? How do we reduce exclusionary school discipline? How do we embed a focus, a targeted focus on reducing inequities and disparities, and how do we strengthen that process of accessing alternative services and supports either in the school or in the community?

Finally, do we have the capacity? Do we have the capacity as a team? Do we have the right people here that are interested and invested in playing a role in this process and how do we identify what that means? Sometimes it's easy to say, "Oh, when there's a problem, or there's a behavior incident in the school, or there's a crisis, we call Sam and Sam is our responder, and that's the process."

Well, is that a sustainable process? What if Sam is out? What if that position changes? What if there are multiple things happening at once? How do you get to the point where there's a really embedded, strong, coordinated process that can address these needs? So those are some of the first steps in terms of thinking about readiness, thinking about really identifying what are the core goals that your particular team wants to address for your population.

Then the team-based approach really is designed to help better collaborate, to improve coordination, communication, and shared accountability across this process as well. When we talk about including families at the table, that's also sometimes where you get a little bit of pushback. Like, well, we don't want families to see where the challenges are or where's the contribution? What do we expect from them?

How do we want them to be involved? We might not be talking about the standard PTA volunteers who volunteer for fundraisers. We're thinking about true partnership among families that have these needs and challenges, but also have significant strengths and are invested in improving how the SRM process works and really getting to positive and equitable outcomes for students. So thinking about who those key partners should be, how do we come together as a team and identify then, what those next steps are.

Once that partnership has developed, it can really provide a foundation for comprehensive trauma-informed school mental health systems that not only meet the needs of your particular students in the SRM, but across the system, across the multi-tiered system of services and supports so that you're building in health promotion and prevention efforts.

You're building in early identification, you're building in more intensive and individualized targeted supports than when needed for these particular students and doing it in this way through a collaborative process can really also build in sustainability. I think that's one of the lessons learned throughout the pandemic across many schools and communities is what happens and what do you do when the system you know or the process you know is not available to you, or when everybody's in a crisis situation.

When students are out of the building and services may not be as available on site as they were previously, then where do you go? How do you refer students? How do you even identify students in that situation? So having this structured approach, having partnerships in the community, particularly with community-based providers that can fill in some of those gaps and having that as an already established partnership can help make these transitions much more smooth and again, foster that sustainability over time, so that ultimately you're working towards a better outcomes.

Those are just some of key steps that I would mention now and I think, again, it's really important to think about where do we start, starting from an authentic place and really being concrete about what goals you have as a team that you want to work on together.

### **I Crystal Bradow**

Excellent. Thank you so much Jeana, we're wrapping up this conversation shortly, and I think it would be really helpful for our listeners who hopefully now know a little bit more about the SRM components and the value of this school, family, community partnerships piece, some very concrete, key steps that they can take to engage cross-systems and community partners. So if we were to close out this discussion with some very explicit guidance for folks that want to get more engaged in this work, what would those steps be? Jeff, do you have any thoughts on that?

### **I Jeff Vanderploeg**

Yeah, I do and thank you for asking, because sometimes you can get lost. You listen to an hour-long podcast, I understand everything that was said, but what are the five things I need to do? So I'm happy to tell you, I am going to list the five things that you need to do to get this work started. I'm going to point back to the title of this podcast, which is school and family and community partnership.

So step one is identifying who your key stakeholders are in your SRM and thinking along each of those dimensions. Who are the folks within the school that you want to engage in this? And that often means administrators, school resource officers, the school social workers, psychologists, and perhaps a few others in your building and obviously family members. Are there family members who are already engaged in other initiatives going on in the school, and can we also engage them in this, or can we ask them what other family members should we be talking to, to help us with this SRM effort?

Then at the community level, like Jeana and others have mentioned along the way, your behavioral health providers, your juvenile legal system partners, maybe there's a juvenile court judge who's supportive about the effort and certainly, the treatment or provider community is part of it. So that's step one, identifying who your key stakeholders are at the family, school, and community level and engaging them and inviting them to be part of your team.

Then step two is to build buy-in, and what do I mean by that? Because that can sometimes be a squishy goal, but what we mean by building buy-in is setting some very clear goals and some very concrete strategies and objectives that you're going to undertake as a group and working with that team of partners, I mentioned earlier to do all this.

Not just setting it yourself as a school, but engaging all those partners and coming up with a collective vision and setting some clear goals and strategies that you're going to undertake, ensuring that there's very clear roles and responsibilities for all the partners around the table, how decisions are going to be made and how you're going to make sure that there are clear and open lines of communication among those partners.

So that's number two, building buy-in by doing all of those things. Number three is identifying what unique strengths each of these partners brings to the table. Not everybody is going to be involved in every single part of the SRM. Without a question, the school personnel are going to be responsible for responding in some way to a behavioral incident that occurs and family members bring unique strengths and play a certain role in this work, and obviously your providers out in the community play a particular role.

So number three is identifying what the unique strengths are for each one of those partners and building on those strengths. Number four is identifying and overcoming perceived barriers. I think it's not realistic and naive to think that you're going to get this group of people together in a room. You're going to decide that doing an SRM is a great idea and off you go, and they're going to be no problems.

There will be problems. Some of those problems will be predictable, and you can put some things in place, but you should engage in conversation with that group to identify what the barriers are. If, for example, one of our barriers is that we don't have a very strong referral system to our community behavioral health partners, or when we make a referral to a community behavioral health partner and we don't get communication back from them.

Okay, you've identified a barrier. So how are you going to address that barrier to make this process work? I think the same goes for many of the other partners around the table. Even the process of getting that group of people together may not work very efficiently at first because family members work until five and the school closes at five, and maybe not everybody's excited to meet during hours that work for everybody.

So that's going to be a barrier as well. You have to figure out efficient ways to get everybody together to talk about this work. So that's number four. Number four is identifying and overcoming perceived barriers. Then the last one, number five, is creating a culture of accountability and really, can't underestimate how important it can be in doing this work to be regularly collecting data and reporting it back to your group.

Because if all these efforts are for not, and they're not working, then why are we doing this and if you don't have the data to know whether you're making an impact, you're not going to be able to communicate to that group and keep them engaged over time. On the flip side, when you start showing impact, when you start showing that group that their efforts are making a difference, that there are fewer kids being suspended and expelled and arrested in your school building, and that over time, those students are less likely to come into contact your office for disciplinary issues, that can be incredibly motivating to that group of people and guess what else? Funders are probably going to love to see that information.

So now you have some data to put in front of a funding partner to say, "We've undertaken this work. It's been effective. We're driving down these incidents and we're demonstrating very good outcomes. Let's keep this momentum going. Let's keep this work going." So tracking data, sharing outcomes, responding to what you see. If it's not working and you see in your data that you're not having impact, well, now you know that you need to dig in and find out what changes you need to make to your approach to get the outcomes you're looking for.

So staying relentlessly focused on impact is a really an important piece of all of this. So those are your five. Identify your partners, build buy-in across your partners, identify what their strengths are and build on them, identify and overcome perceived barriers, and then creating a culture of accountability. If you can do those five things with your school,



community partnership, you'll be off to a great start with SRM.

### | Crystal Brandow

Thank you so much for that. I love how you mentioned a couple of times that this is a process. NCYOJ has worked with schools on this and spent a year on building this cross-systems team, getting this buy-in, identifying stakeholders, doing a community asset mapping, and seeing who is there that needs to be at the table, and then how do we build that buy-in in a meaningful way and build on those strengths and work together to identify the barriers and how they'll be overcome. So this is a process that takes time. It's not like you said, "Okay, we're doing an SRM. Let's go," and imagining success right off the bat, but there is the work that has to be put in across these different partners and getting on the same page with why this is happening, what's the benefit and how this will flow and it could take time.

NCYOJ has spent, again, one year working on building collaborative teams with schools as well as going back to something that was mentioned earlier, looking at existing policies. Spent a year just on those two things, which isn't actually implementing the framework in the school community. It's, how do we get prepared and set up for success to do that in the future? So I love that you mentioned process a few times because it is indeed a process. Thank you for that, Jeff, and as we close out, are there any final thoughts that either of you would like to share about school, family, community partnerships, and the School Responder Model?

### | Jeff Vanderploeg

I just give everybody a little bit of hope as they're getting started, or they're implementing this work, or they might be interested or curious about doing this work, just to let folks know that Jeana has been overseeing the SBDI project here in Connecticut for a number of years, and we have seen a 35 to 40% reduction in juvenile court referrals for schools that participate in our version of the SRM, which is called the School-Based Diversion Initiative. So that is just my way of communicating to listeners here that this is worthwhile and it does work when you do the work. It's effective. It actually drives down these outcomes. So it's worthwhile, it's worth doing and it's really much better for students.

### | Jeana Bracey

Thank you for that, Jeff. I think it's very important to recognize that and also, my final thought I would leave people with is, this really is about focusing on relationships. I know in Connecticut, we are fortunate to have a pretty robust system of formal services for children's behavioral health, but it's not just limited to that. It is really thinking about where are your existing relationships already that can help you engage in this work. We often turn to our wraparound or system of care principles to think about who are those natural informal supports? Is it your youth services? Is it faith-based providers? Is it school-based health centers? There are so many resources and people available that have this common vision in mind that can be partners to you in this work. So don't be discouraged by thinking that, oh, we don't have all this formal process in place already. Really, just start with those low-hanging fruit. Start with basic relationships, and you certainly can get far with your SRM.

### | Crystal Brandow

Thank you so much. Thank you both for, yet again, another wonderful discussion on School Responder Model. It's always a pleasure connecting with both of you and hearing about your approach to this work and the success that you've had in Connecticut. So thank you and thank you to our listeners for joining us.

### | Jeff Vanderploeg

Thanks, Crystal.

### | Jeana Bracey

Thank you!

## CONCLUSION FROM ARIA JORDAN

We thank our listeners for tuning into this conversation. We hope you learned some new information about the value of integrating partnerships into an SRM. To learn more and access curated resources about school, family, community partnerships, and SRM, please visit our School Responder Model virtual toolbox at [srm.policyresearchinc.org](http://srm.policyresearchinc.org), as well as the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut website at [chdi.org](http://chdi.org). Thank you again for listening.