PRESS KIT

Dr. Brenda Ortiz McGrath

Ed.D., MSW

Educational Leader · District Administrator · Consultant · Author · Systems Builder

“Opening a door creates an opportunity. Creating belonging gives someone the confidence to walk through it.”

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Brenda Ortiz McGrath, Ed.D., MSW is an educational leader, district administrator, consultant, author, and researcher who strengthens PK–12 systems — leadership, policy, social-emotional learning, student support, and family and community engagement — so that every student has a real path to success.

She currently serves as a PK–12 District Administrator for Chelsea Public Schools, leading social work, social-emotional learning, school mental health, grant development and management, data and continuous improvement, staff supervision, and community partnerships districtwide. She previously served as Principal of Waltham High School — the first Latina and first woman to lead the school in 53 years — and as the district's first Latina administrator.

She is the creator of the MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™, a culturally grounded model designed to strengthen the identity, voice, and leadership of Latina women, and the creator of CoreKind360 Family Connect. She is an elected Lynn School Committee Member At-Large, chairing both the DEI and Policy subcommittees.

At a Glance

20+
Years in Education

12+
Years in Educational Leadership

PK–12
District Leadership

Principal
Former High School Principal

Ed.D.
Researcher

Author
Books & Scholarship

Elected
School Committee Member

Founder
Creator of Initiatives

Current Roles

- District Administrator, PK–12 — Chelsea Public Schools (social work, SEL, school mental health, grants, data, and student support systems)
- Elected School Committee Member At-Large, City of Lynn — Chair, DEI Subcommittee; Chair, Policy Subcommittee
- Creator, MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™ and CoreKind360 Family Connect
- Vice President, Lynn Hispanic Scholarship Fund

SPEAKING & CONSULTING

Signature Talks

Mija, You Were Built to Lead

Identity, culture, courage, and leadership.

Rooted in Identity. Built for Impact.

Leading systems, developing people, and creating pathways for others to rise.

Tier 1 Is Not Basic

Why universal systems are the foundation of successful student support.

From Programs to Systems

Building sustainable SEL, MTSS, and whole-child infrastructure.

Speaking Topics

- Educational Leadership & Systems Change
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Student Mental Health & Wellness
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- Culturally Responsive Leadership
- Latina Leadership & Identity
- The MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™
- Artificial Intelligence & Student Support
- Equity & Belonging in PK–12 Education
- Restorative Practices
- Community Partnerships
- Multilingual Learner Support
- Women in Leadership
- Leadership Through Identity, Healing & Purpose

Formats Offered

Keynote (45–60 minutes) A single, story-driven address for conferences, convocations, and district kickoffs.
Half-Day Workshop (3 hours) Interactive learning with protocols, team planning time, and take-home tools.
Full-Day Institute (6 hours) Deep implementation work for leadership teams building SEL, MTSS, or student …
Multi-Session Series (3–6 sessions) Job-embedded professional learning across a semester or school year, …
Leadership Cohort (Custom) A facilitated cohort experience for aspiring and sitting leaders, including …
Panel & Fireside Conversation (30–90 minutes) Moderated conversation on leadership, equity, youth …
Executive & Board Advising (Custom) Strategy sessions with superintendents, boards, and nonprofit …
Virtual Session or Webinar (60–90 minutes) Live online learning for regional, statewide, or national …

Initiatives

MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™

A culturally grounded leadership model for Latina women, built on five flames: La Chispa, La Voz, La Mesa, La Guardia, and La Herencia. The book, workshops, and organizational learning. mijalumbre.info

CoreKind360 Family Connect

Free, bilingual whole-child and family SEL tools, resources, and KindBot support for families, caregivers, and educators. corekind360families.com

SELECTED ENGAGEMENTS

Where Brenda Has Spoken

bryt Symposium 2026 — Navigating Toward Hope 2026 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Reimagining Tier 1 Student Support with a Clinician-Developed AI Resource

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary … 2026 · Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Using a Continuous Improvement Cycle to Create Safe, Supportive Environments

New York University — Master of Social Work Program 2025 · Guest Presenter
Tier 1 Mental Health Support and AI Tools in Schools

CASEL 2025 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
CASEL 2025 Presentation

MASCA 2024 · Co-Presenter, Chelsea Public Schools
Using Tech to Support a Comprehensive Counseling Program

CASEL SEL Exchange 2025 & 2026 · Presenter
AI in Action: Explore Personalized SEL Through Research and Practice

The Urban Assembly — SEL 4 All Symposium 2025 · Presenter
Building a Comprehensive SEL Team-Based Model to Transform School Culture

Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education 2022 · Invited Presenter
Presented Chelsea Public Schools' districtwide approach to social-emotional learning, behavioral health, mental …

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and … Multiple Engagements · Presenter & Workshop Facilitator
Facilitated workshops and presentations for Massachusetts educators and leaders on social-emotional learning, …

National Center for School Mental Health Annual Conference 2024 · Presenter
Nuestra Comunidad: How One District Leverages Technology to Enhance a Community Mental Health Program

Honors & Fellowships

The Catalyst Award, 20th Annual Women of ALPFA …
Grand Marshal, Latin American Flags Parade (2026)
Visionary Leader Award, Influencer Magazine …
City Citation, City of Chelsea (2025)
Top 50 Educator Nationwide (2026)
Honorary Hispanic Leader 2026, 11th Annual Lynn …
Featured in Times Square, Influencer Magazine UK …
City Citation, City of Lynn — Hispanic Heritage …

CASEL SEL Lead Fellow · 2025–2026 cohort
LeadBoston Scholarship Recipient, YW Boston · 2024–2025
Aspiring Latino Leaders Fellow, Latinos for Education · 2023–2024
Influence 100 Fellow · Cohort 2 · 2020–2021

Education & Licensure

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Educational Leadership & Supervision American International College — …
Master of Social Work (MSW) Boston College — 2006, clinical and school social work practice
Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Wheelock College
Educational Leadership University of New England — 2017–2018

Massachusetts licensure: Superintendent (Professional); Principal K–12; School Adjustment Counselor; Director of Pupil Personnel; Director of School Counseling; Attendance / Truancy Supervisor

Invite Dr. Ortiz McGrath

Booking, media, and consulting requests: innovateleadelevate@gmail.com
drbrendaortizmcgrath.com/speaking · https://www.linkedin.com/in/brendaortizmcgrath/
https://mijalumbre.info · https://corekind360families.com

INCLUDED DOCUMENTS

A complete record, ready to share

This press kit brings the leadership record and the full MASCA deck-page companion together with Brenda's biography, selected presentations, honors, and credentials.

Leadership & Impact

The next five pages document school and district roles, Chelsea PK–12 programs and practices, original initiatives, and public and community service. Dates and outcomes follow the Leadership page on the website.

Pages 5–9 · drbrendaortizmcgrath.com/leadership

MASCA 2024 · Comprehensive Counseling

The following twenty pages include the section index and all nineteen public slide previews from Using Tech to Support a Comprehensive Counseling Program, presented with Scott Freschet of Alongside. View or download the original presentation separately from the MASCA page.

Pages 10–29 · drbrendaortizmcgrath.com/presentations/masca

New York University · Master of Social Work Program — Tier 1 Mental Health Support and AI Tools in Schools (March 2025) appears in Selected Engagements on page 3.

DR. BRENDA ORTIZ MCGRATH · ED.D., MSW

Leadership & Impact

From direct work with students and families to school administration, districtwide systems, civic service, and original initiatives — a record of where Dr. Ortiz McGrath has led and what the work has made possible.

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Schools and districts

District Administrator, PK–12

Chelsea Public Schools · 2022–Present

Leads districtwide strategy across an 11-school PK–12 system serving approximately 6,300 students, aligning academic, attendance, behavioral, SEL/MTSS, family-engagement, and specialized-support priorities. Leads and develops professional teams through PLC structures and data-informed routines, advises central office leaders, principals, and school teams on crisis response and compliance, and directs grants, vendor and community partnerships with families, public agencies, healthcare and crisis providers, and regional organizations.

Principal

Waltham High School · 2021–Aug 2022

First Latina and first woman to lead the school in 53 years. Directed schoolwide instructional strategy, operations, culture, and student-success priorities through an improvement plan centered on academic growth and belonging; led the Instructional Leadership Team in developing the Quality School Plan; supervised and evaluated faculty and school-based teams; and expanded family partnership through the PTO, School Site Council, home visits, adult education, and the Latinx Parent Leadership Group.

Associate Principal

Waltham Public Schools · 2017–2021

The district's first Latina administrator. Led high school house operations, student-success systems, school climate, and discipline, advancing the School Improvement Plan with department leaders. Provided staff supervision, coaching, and professional learning, and introduced and scaled restorative practices as a schoolwide approach to belonging, accountability, and culture.

Head of Family & Community Engagement / Dean of Students

Bentley Academy, Salem · 2014–2017

A founding member of the school's turnaround work, partnering with families, staff, and community organizations as the school achieved Level 1 status.

School Adjustment Counselor

Waltham Public Schools · 2006–2014

Eight years of direct practice with students and families — supporting transitions, emotional well-being, peer relationships, and academic stress, and connecting families to community resources.

DISTRICT PROGRAMS · CHELSEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS · 2022–PRESENT

Structures and supports

Young Parenting Program

PK–12 district leadership

Oversight of the grades 7–12 program supporting pregnant and parenting students to stay enrolled and on track.

Districtwide SEL

PK–12 district leadership

Leading PK–12 social-emotional learning implementation, curriculum alignment, and staff professional learning.

Mediation & Intervention Specialists

PK–12 district leadership

Building a program that resolves conflict early and keeps students connected to school.

School Mental Health & Telehealth

PK–12 district leadership

Coordinating clinical supports, telehealth providers, and youth mental health programming across schools.

McKinney-Vento, Migrant & Military Families

PK–12 district leadership

Ensuring students experiencing housing instability and transition receive enrollment, transport, and support.

Crisis Response & Safety

PK–12 district leadership

Leading crisis response protocols, de-escalation training, and districtwide safety coordination.

Grant Development

PK–12 district leadership

Writing and managing grants that fund student support, mental health, and family engagement work.

Data & Continuous Improvement

PK–12 district leadership

Using YRBS and districtwide survey data to shape priorities and measure whether supports are working.

Staff Leadership & Development

PK–12 district leadership

Supervising school social workers and multidisciplinary teams, and leading professional learning across the district.

Community Partnerships

PK–12 district leadership

Connecting schools with community organizations that extend care beyond the school day.

EVIDENCE IN PRACTICE

Chelsea Public Schools

Bilingual, bicultural supports

District practice

Building a team that reflects the community it serves — in Chelsea, a majority-Latino district with multilingual needs — so mental health support is genuinely accessible to every family.

Reaching families proactively

District practice

An annual districtwide mental health event drawing close to 1,000 families, alongside Parent University programming that builds familiarity with mental health support long before any individual family needs it.

A trusted person in every school

District practice

A family liaison in each of Chelsea's 11 schools, giving families a consistent, familiar person to talk to about what they and their students need — separate from any single referral moment.

Data that strengthens access

District practice

Monthly clinical consultancy meetings where the team reviews real-time referral data together, so access to care is measured, discussed, and improved rather than assumed.

ORIGINAL INITIATIVES

Programs she created

MijaLumbre Leadership Framework™

Creator

Developed a culturally grounded framework for Latina women leaders around identity, voice, purpose, and power, with a book, cohorts, and facilitated learning.

CoreKind360 Family Connect

Creator

Built a family-centered approach connecting character, belonging, and whole-child support across home, school, and community.

Innovate · Lead · Elevate

Educational consulting

Works with schools and organizations on leadership, student support, and systems change tailored to their goals.

PUBLIC & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Governance, boards and advisory work

Elected School Committee Member, Policy Chair & DEI Chair — Lynn School Committee

Current

Providing public governance, budget oversight, policy review, constituent communication, and accountability for district priorities; chairs Policy and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion work through a student-centered, equity-minded, fiscally responsible lens.

Vice President, Lynn Hispanic Scholarship Fund

Current

Supporting access to higher education for Latino students in Lynn.

Commissioner, Essex County Commission for the Status of Women

2023–2026

Served on the National Association of Commissions for Women, advancing equity, opportunity, and women's rights across Essex County.

Board Member, Lynn Housing Trust Fund

Current

Advocating for housing stability as a foundation for student success.

National Advisory Board, Alongside

Current

Advising on youth mental health supports and how schools can reach students earlier.

Massachusetts Association for Mental Health Advisory Council

Current

Contributing a school-systems perspective to statewide mental health policy and practice.

Healthy Families Advisory Board

Current

Supporting programs that strengthen young families and early childhood well-being.

Advisory Council, Eliot Family Resource Center

Current

Guiding family-centered services that connect caregivers to mental health, wellness, and community resources.

MASCA / APRIL 2024

Using Tech to Support a Comprehensive Counseling Program

Dr. Brenda Ortiz McGrath, MSW · Chelsea Public Schools

Scott Freschet · Co-founder of Alongside

How technology can support a comprehensive school counseling program and expand student access to mental health support.

SECTIONS / 19 SLIDES

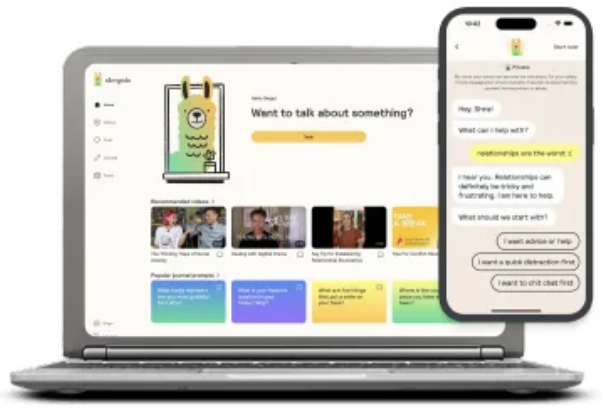
02 About Alongside
03 Teen advocacy opportunity
04 Student Mental Health in CPS
05 Chelsea Public Schools at a glance
06 Defining mental health
07 How mental health presents in CPS
08 Comprehensive school mental health system
09 Multi-Tiered System of Support
10 Meeting student needs
11 Tier 1: Universal supports
12 Universal mental health screening
13 Screener results & learnings
14 Children's Cabinet
15 Children's Cabinet subcommittees
16 Alongside in practice
17 What students are saying
18 Live demo
19 Thank you & questions

Title slide

alongside
Using Tech to Support a Comprehensive Counseling Program
Scott Freschet
Cofounder, Alongside
Brenda Pena, MSW
Director of Social Work
Chelsea Public Schools

About Alongside

Alongside helps schools cover all students with research-based mental health support that adolescents like and trust



Clinician-created content
Provides therapy exercises created by doctoral clinicians

24/7
Available when students have time and feel the desire to open up

Non-judgmental
Provides a confidential place to share thoughts and emotions without judgment

Chatbot magic
Students can chat about any problem they are facing and get validation and advice

Escalation
Connects to school and 24/7 resources in cases of suicidal ideation and severe issues

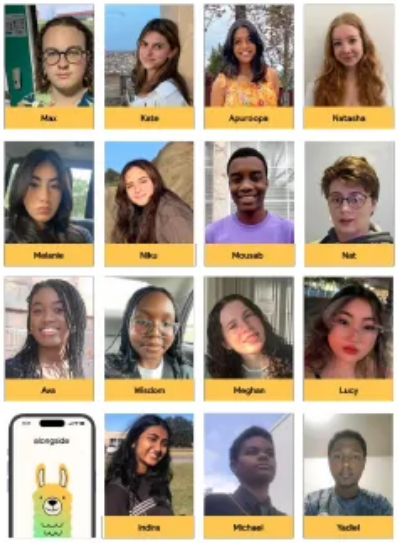
Native language
Converses in the student's preferred language, making it easier to communicate feelings

Teen advocacy opportunity

Do you know teens that are passionate about supporting and de-stigmatizing youth mental health?

Have them apply for our ***paid*** summer internship!
Deadline to apply is April 15

Our 2023 summer interns



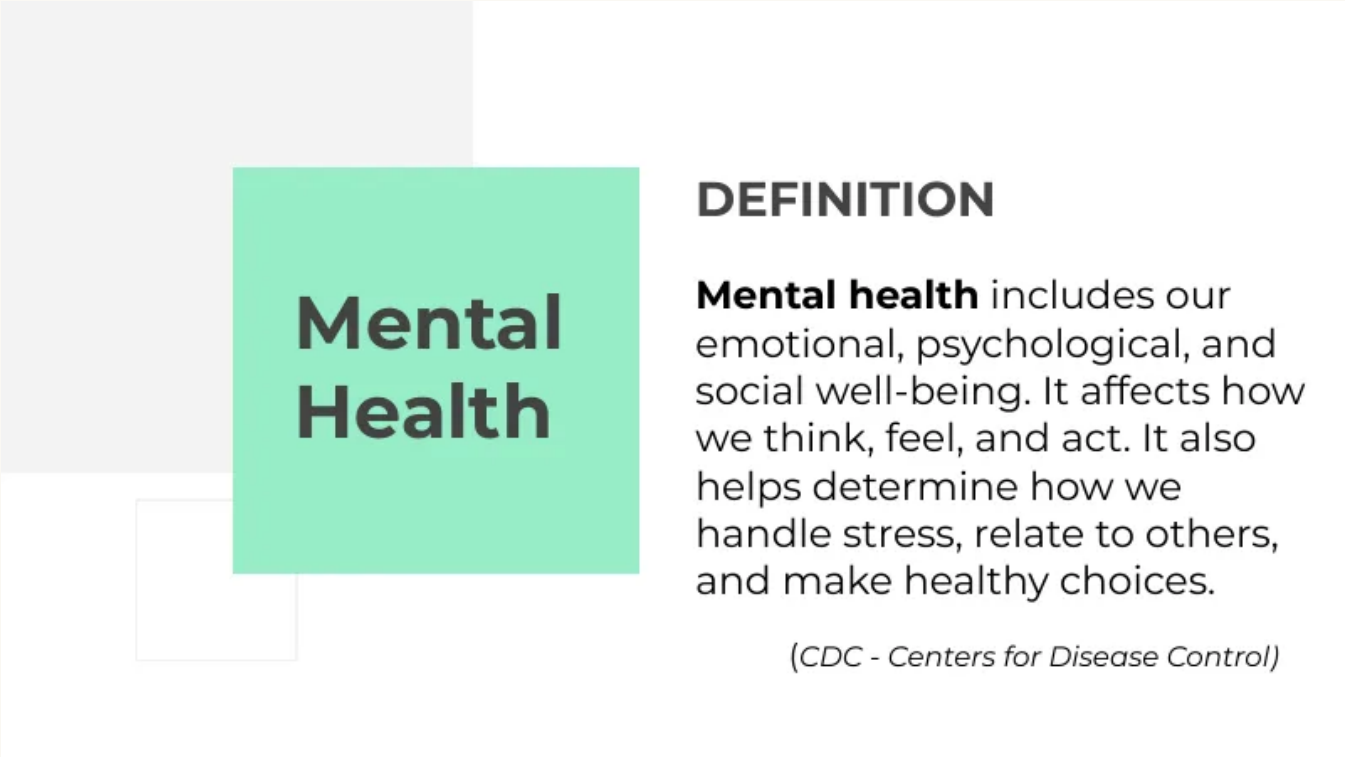
Student Mental Health in CPS

Chelsea Public Schools at a glance

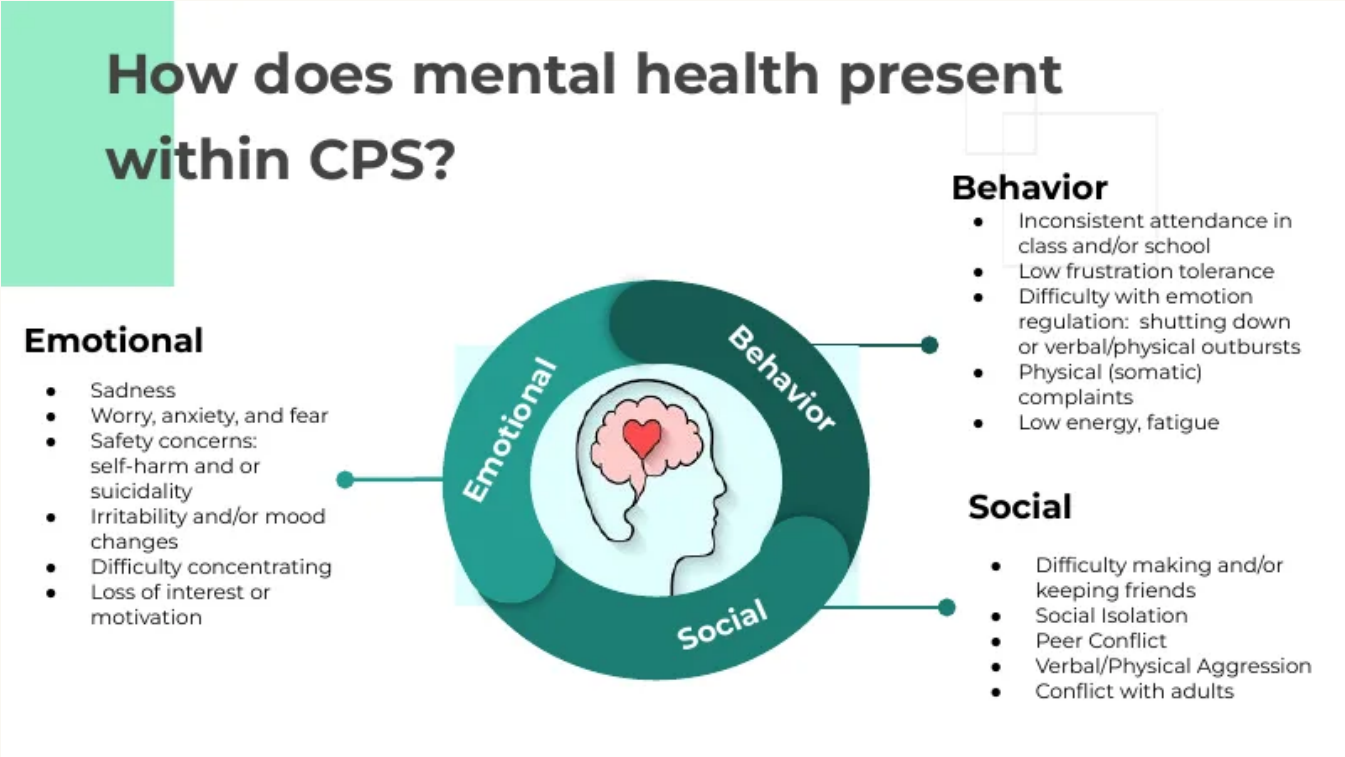
Chelsea Public Schools "Nuestra Comunidad"

11 Schools	District Enrollment	Student Race and Ethnicity	Populations Served
Pre-K — Grade 12	6,611 Students	• Hispanic - 88% • African American - 4.3% • White - 6.3% • Asian - .7%	• First Language not English - 84% • First Language Learner - 43.7% • High Needs: 90.6% • Low Income - 80.5%

Defining mental health



How mental health presents in CPS



Comprehensive school mental health system

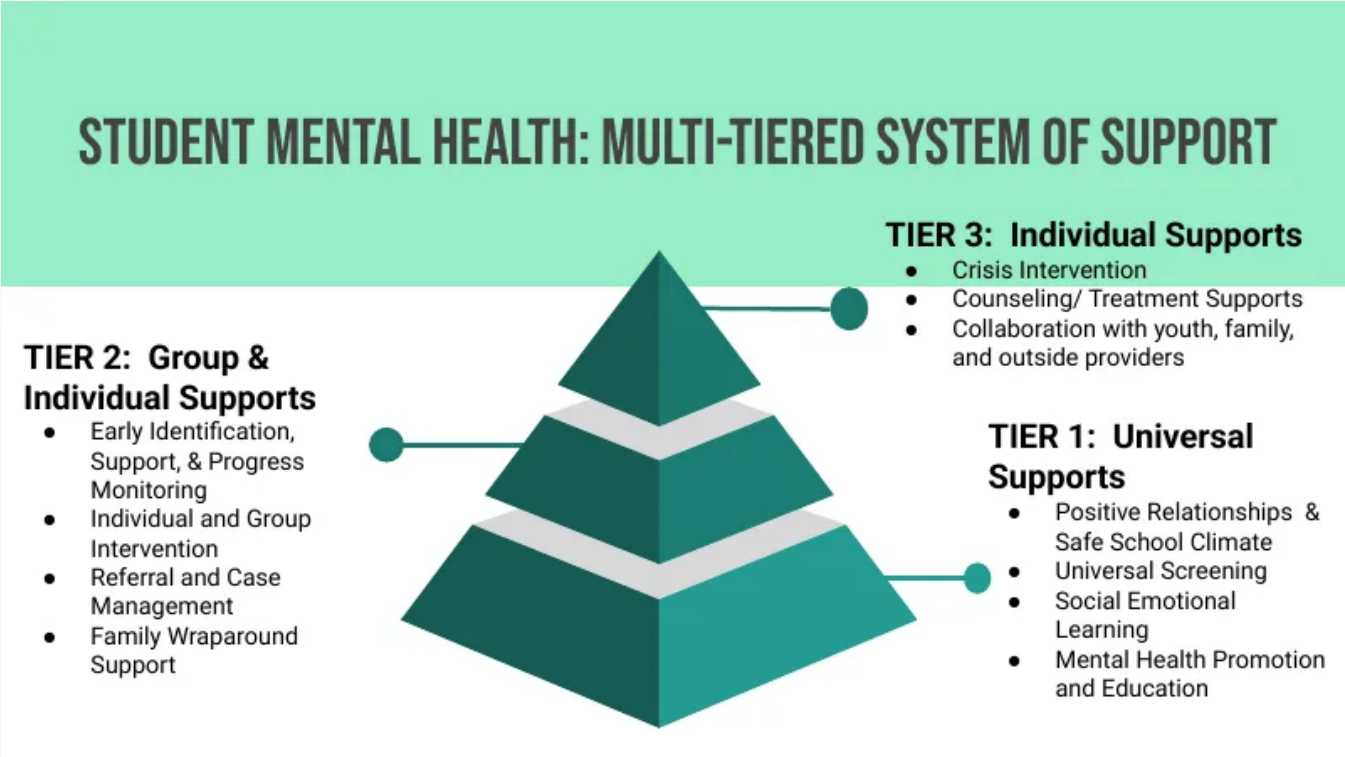
Comprehensive school mental health system

Comprehensive school mental health systems provide an array of supports and services that promote positive school climate, social and emotional learning, and mental health and well-being, while reducing the prevalence and severity of mental illness.

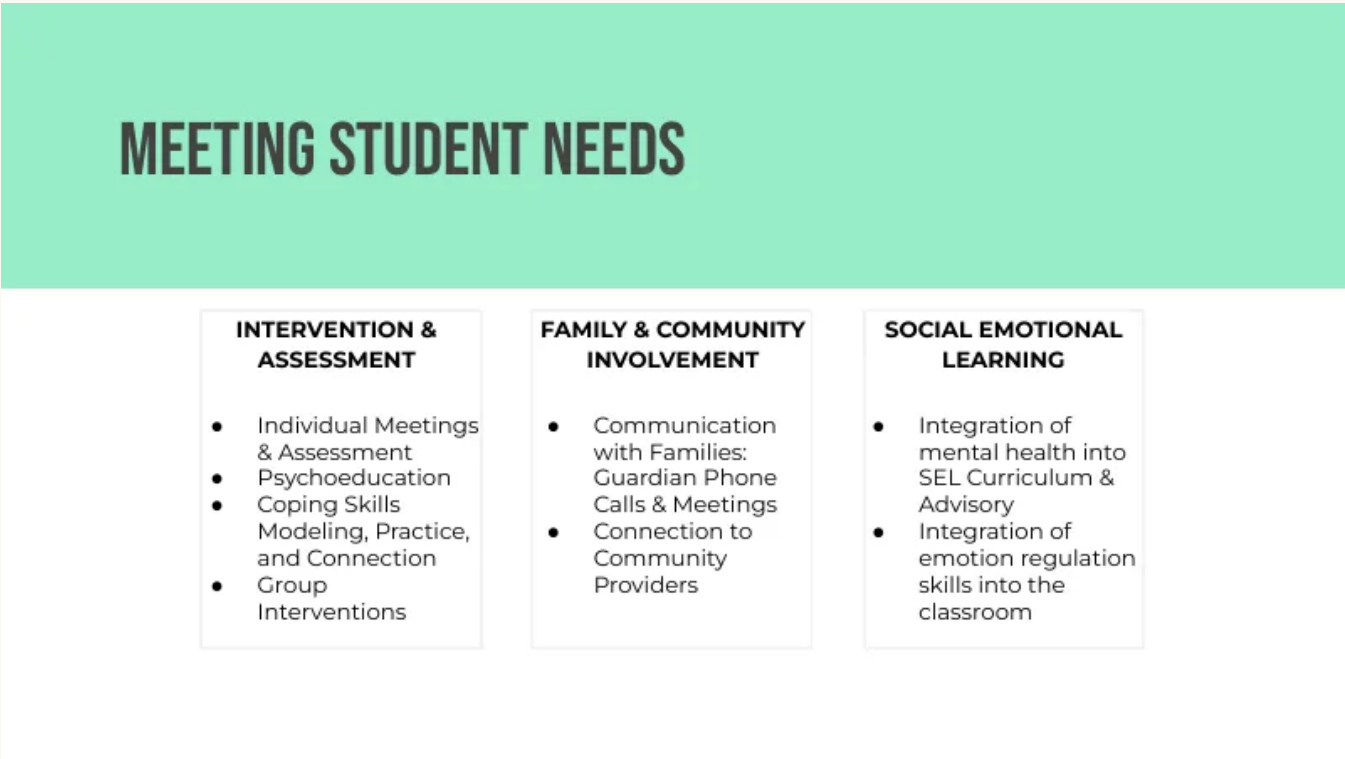
CPS Lead Team Members:

- SEL Leads & SEL School-based Teams
- School Counselors
- School Social Workers
- Special Education Staff
- Mediation/MTSS Staff
- Homelessness Liaison
- Young Parenting Coordinator
- Family Liaisons

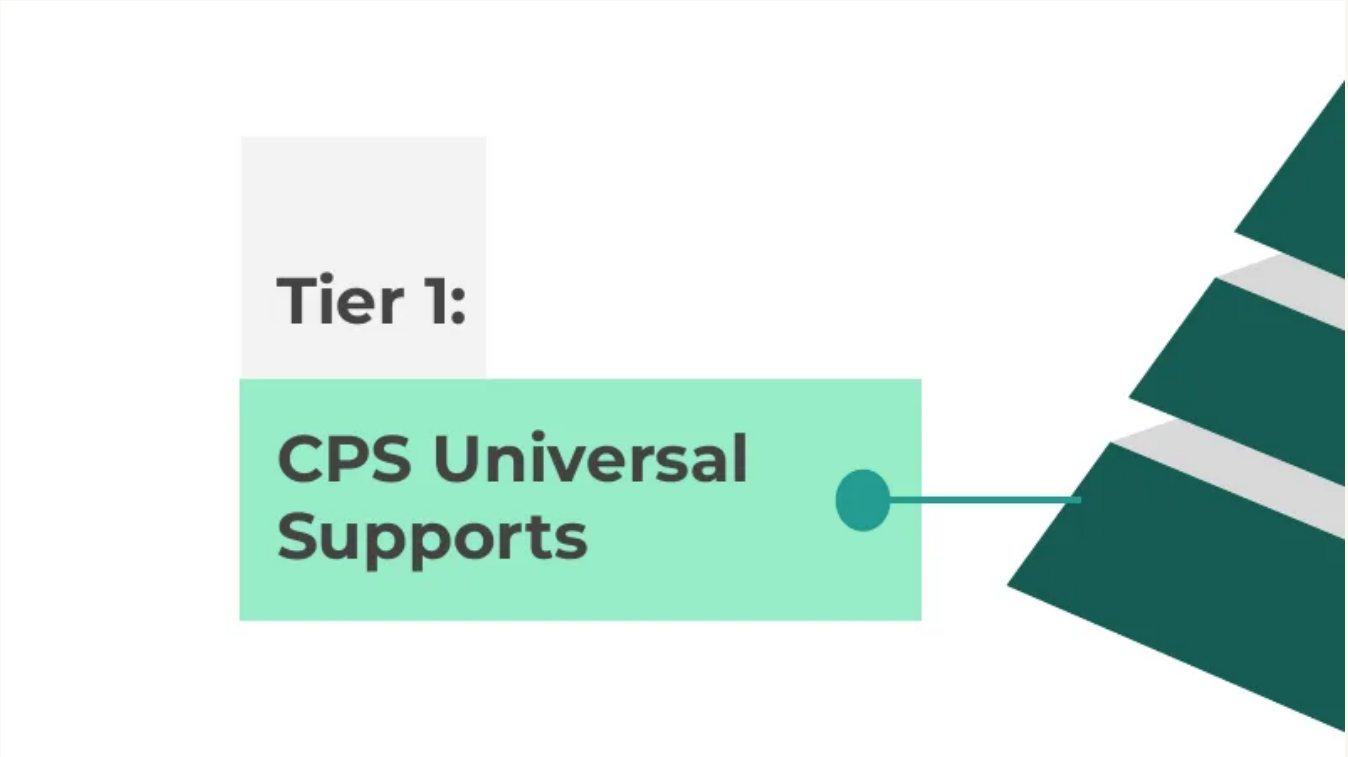
Multi-Tiered System of Support



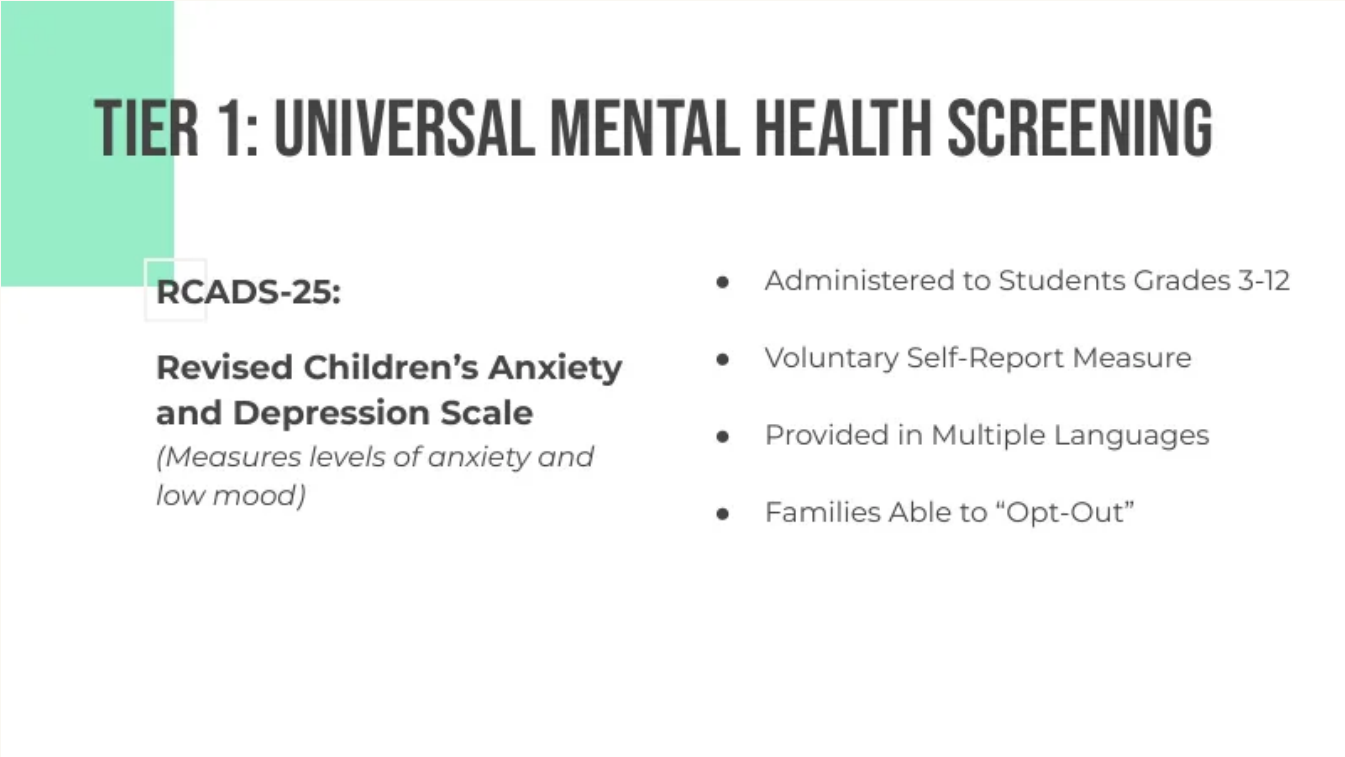
Meeting student needs



Tier 1: Universal supports



Universal mental health screening



Screener results & learnings

MENTAL HEALTH SCREENER RESULTS & LEARNING

STRENGTHS

- Students take it seriously.
- De-stigmatized mental health.
- Identified students who may not have previously been referred (~50%)
- Allowed for early intervention and connection to resources.

CHALLENGES

- Some students opt out of participation.
- Percentage of students identified through screener can be larger than national norms.
- Limited capacity of available community resources.

Children's Cabinet

CHILDREN'S CABINET

"Bodies typically composed of the heads of government, business, and nonprofit agencies/organizations with child- and youth-serving programs"

Children's cabinets meet regularly to...

- Coordinate services
- Develop a common set of outcomes
- Collaboratively decide upon and implement plans

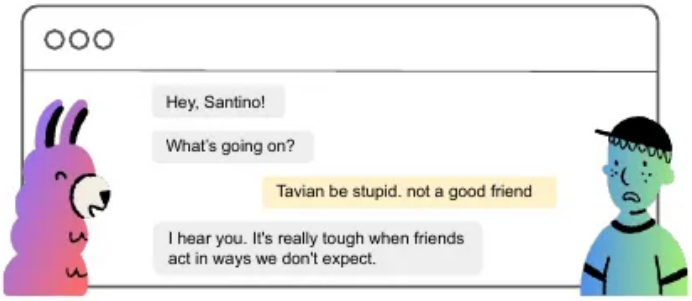
...all to foster the well-being of young people

CHELSEA CARES
Chelsea Children's Cabinet

Children's Cabinet subcommittees

Alongside in practice

ALONGSIDE



NEEDS & CHALLENGES

Need effective Tier 1 support and prevention for all middle and high school students

Mental health support must also meet the needs of our Latinx and EL students

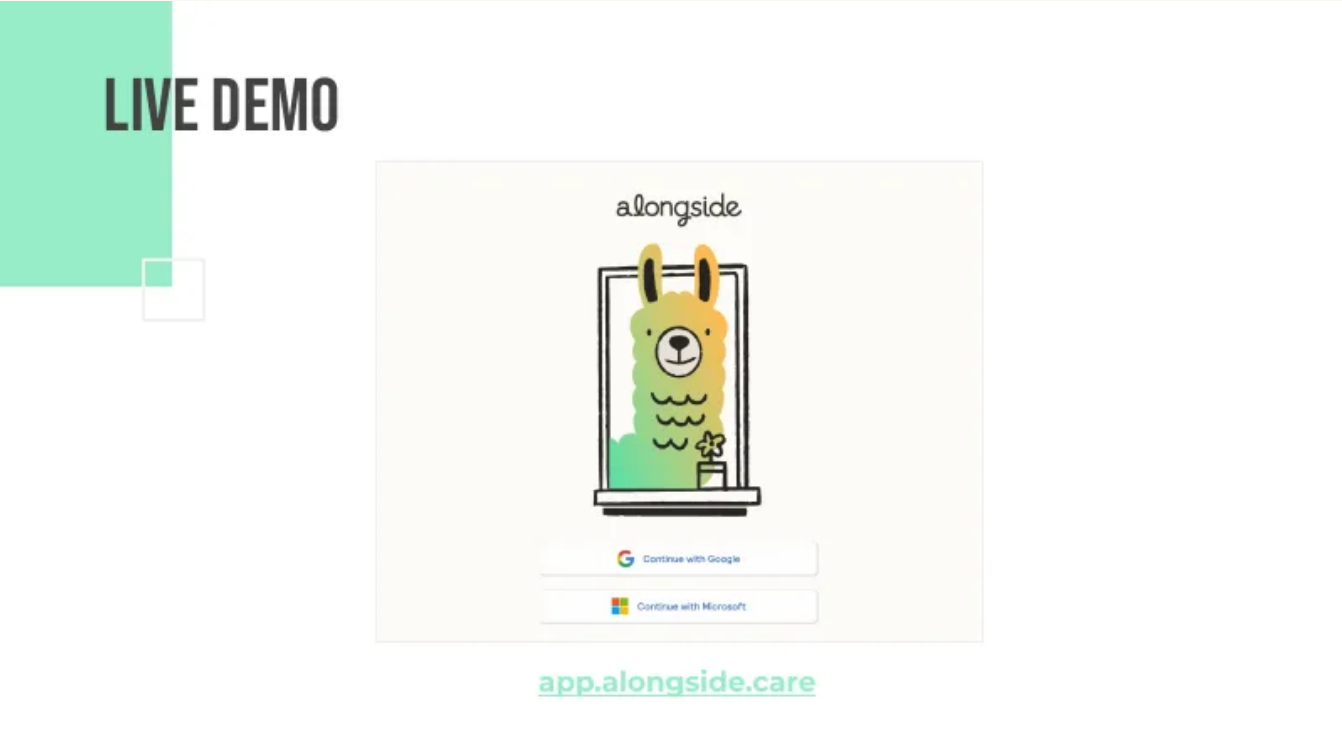
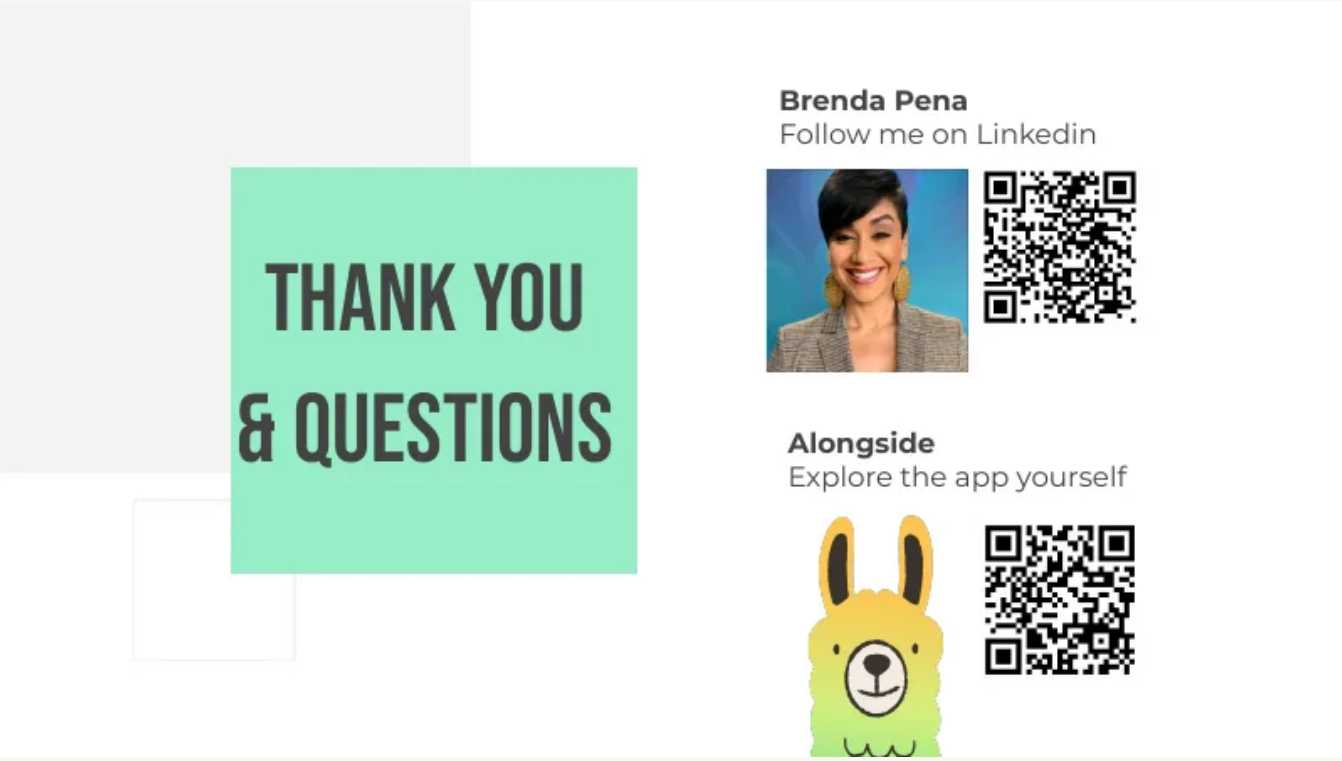
HOW ALONGSIDE ADDRESSES

Alongside is a mental health app that provides personalized prevention and early intervention to every secondary student

Students can converse in 30+ languages, making it easier to communicate feelings and get help

What students are saying

Live demo


LIVE DEMO
alongside
Continue with Google
Continue with Microsoft
app.alongside.care

Thank you & questions