

Reducing Youth Violence through Partnership between Schools and Their Police Department: Lessons from Gustine M.A.P.S.



Local Evaluation Report

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PROGRAM PURPOSE

Program Background

The goal of the Mental Health and Programming in Schools (MAPS) program by the City of Gustine was to help students in grades one through high school discover their path to success while also diverting youth from violent or criminal paths. MAPS is one of six "small city" programs funded by the California Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant (CalVIP), Cohort 3, from October 2020 through December 31, 2023.

Gustine was the smallest of the six funded locations (1.6 square miles, population under 6,200) and among the most isolated geographically. Gustine is a rural city on the west side of Merced County. It is far from common public support agencies like health and social welfare, economic development, and transportation systems. The city supports residents in neighboring unincorporated villages (e.g., Santa Nella). The agriculture industry is the primary economic support for Gustine, surrounded by miles of farmland. Agricultural jobs contribute to lower wages, seasonal work, and cause some to drive far from home for work in other industries. The population is predominantly Latino (60%), Spanish-speaking (40%), with lower completion of higher education (10% bachelor's degree or higher), and lower-income (median income \$51,636).

Rural isolation, higher rates of cultural and linguistic barriers, and low socio-economic contribute to challenges in accessing public services and less community safety. When assessing the need for MAPS In 2019, Gustine residents had a 2.5 greater chance of being a victim of a crime than the national average. With 195 aggravated assaults, 164 burglaries, 266 cases of larceny, and 94 vehicle thefts between 2016 and 2019, community leaders sought a change. The growing concern for the community was not just the growing crime but the effect that it was having on its youth.

Between 2017 and 2019, the City of Gustine Police Department (GPD, the lead agency for MAPS) responded to over 6,091 calls involving youth between the schools and the parks. In comparison, the police responded to incidents at the local bar 1,300 times, resulting in 20 arrests between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, there were 26 juvenile arrests (21 Latino) up from 2018. This included one assault with a deadly weapon arrest. Crime in Gustine was having a negative influence on the youth. That negative influence was now leaking into Gustine's schools.

Gustine Unified School District (GUSD), the primary partner and site of implementation for MAPS, indicated similar challenges. From 2017-2020, there were 532 student suspensions. Of those, 63% (335) were for physical violence (fighting/ assault/ battery, use of force, or violence and causing, attempting, or threatening physical injury). Nearly 8% of GUSD students were suspended at least once in the 2019-2020 school year, a 2.5% increase over 2018-2019. These students included seven subgroups, primarily consisting of English learners, Latinos, homeless, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. The criminal issues that the

community was facing were impacting schools. Fighting, gang affiliation, and drug use and distribution were all issues that the school dealt with regularly.

Program Design

The City of Gustine led the development of MAPS in partnership with the GPD, GUSD, and other stakeholders. During six months, the group discussed challenges and created a strategy to reduce youth suspension and justice involvement. A new Youth Services Bureau (YSB) was created within the Gustine Police Department to develop and implement MAPS in partnership with community stakeholders. YSB joined the strengths and guidance of Gustine's youth-serving organizations: community-based organizations, schools, City, police, Merced County Probation, Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, and First Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center. MAPS was modeled after an earlier successful implementation in nearby Livingston, CA. MAPS was created and implemented in Livingston by Gustine's new Police Chief Ruben Chavez, who received the James Q. Wilson Award for Excellence in Community Policing.

The MAPS approach incorporated three evidence-based strategies recommended by the US Department of Justice's Minority Youth Violence Prevention (MYVP) Initiative [REF].

1. Integrating mental health services with school supports, including reducing the use of suspensions,
2. Formal diversion and restorative justice programs that foster constructive peer relationships and
3. Opportunities to experience positive recreational activities and leadership with law enforcement through community policing.

These evidence-based practices prevent justice involvement by offering comprehensive trauma-informed and culturally responsive services and opportunities that empower youth and families to build on their strengths, supplement needs, and create pathways to achieving goals. In Livingston, MAPS led to impressive results after its inaugural year, including a 63% reduction in middle school truancy and a 90% reduction in expulsions. The program continued to produce positive results in its fifth year of implementation.

In Gustine, MAPS tiered services included mental health services and additional community activities for all students (regardless of risk factors), school staff, and parents. None of the MAPS programs and services were available locally.

Along with the YSB, MAPS created an Advisory Council, including representatives from agencies and community members, to provide ongoing oversight and guidance for the quality and impact of the program. The MAPS Team of PD and GUSD staff included school administrators, teachers, counselors, and School Resource Officers (SROs). This team was led by two staff based at the GPD: a Youth Services Coordinator (YSC) leading the overall daily implementation of the program and a Behavioral Health Specialist (BHS) responsible for clinical assessments, counseling, and supporting general education activities.

Program Participants

MAPS participants included all GUSD elementary, middle, and high school students. In 2020, this included a total of 1,741 students enrolled in Gustine Elementary (516 students), Romero Elementary (236 students), Gustine Middle School (406 students), and Gustine High School (583 students). Students of all genders, grade levels, and racial/ethnic backgrounds were eligible to participate. Participation was voluntary and based on referrals from school staff and personal choice. School staff and students understood the program was intended to support students who may be at risk for suspension or disciplinary action and may benefit from restorative justice methods for behavioral health and safety. All students, staff, and parents of students at each school were eligible for general education activities. Targeted activities were provided to students referred to MAPS by school counselors, administrators, or School Resources Officers (SROs) using the School Referral Form.

Program Activities

MAPS included two categories of activities to serve the overall "school community" while offering targeted activities for youth based on their needs.

General educational and informational activities were designed for all school stakeholders (i.e., staff, students, and parents). These included group and public events, training, presentations, field trips, and other activities to raise awareness and understanding of violence and crime prevention and restorative justice. Their common goal was to strengthen relationships among residents and public institutions (e.g., schools, police departments). The MAPS Team created student presentations on topics nominated by students, school staff, and field experts. The primary focus was on helping youth to make good decisions that prevent truancy, suspension, violence, and crime. Student presentations were tailored to the needs of the schools and student age groups. Parent presentations covered topics to help them guide their children away from poor choices and towards beneficial decisions. The goal of parent presentations was to help parents develop awareness over diverse issues such as gangs, the effects of chronic absenteeism, depression, and other issues their children may face. School staff presentations were about the MAPS program, its restorative justice approach, and its services. Presentations raised awareness and engaged teachers, counselors, and administrators as partners for MAPS goals. Overall, activities aimed to strengthen trust and nurture relationships between parents, students, school staff, and police department staff.

Targeted activities were tailored to the violence risk factors of students. Following referral, the MAPS YSC evaluated students' eligibility using a semi-structured interview and school data for the student. Eligibility was determined by chronic absences, truancy, drug use, alcohol use, gang involvement, depression, anxiety, abuse, violent tendencies, and any other behavioral or psychological issues the MAPS team deemed to be acceptable for eligibility. Once eligibility was confirmed by the YSC (coordinator), the BHS (clinician) provided an initial assessment during a counseling session with the participant.

After the initial counseling, the YSC, BHS, and SRO met to determine which tier of services may be best for each participant. The MAPS tiered system was derived from the evidence-based

Response to Intervention strategy with three tiers: Tier I- Universal Prevention; Tier II- Targeted Prevention/Intervention; and Tier III- Intensive Intervention. The tiers guided the program services and experiences for a participant. Targeted program activities varied with each tier number. Tier 1 involved lower risk participants, tier 2 involved medium-high participants, and tier 3 involved higher-risk participants.

Tier 1. Participants were referred to tier 1 due to minor behavioral issues, chronic absences, and truancies. Depending on their needs, the YSC and SRO met with participants for brief check-ins weekly or bi-weekly. Participants discussed communication, acceptable social behaviors, and how absences affected their academic careers. The intervention meetings catered to each participant's offense or reason for referral. Tier 1 participants were anticipated to complete/graduate their MAPS participation within three months and two to four check-ins with MAPS staff. Participation duration was left open and tracked separately for each participant.

Tier 2. Participants were referred to tier 2 because of concerns with depression, anxiety, past abuse, trauma, or other mental health concerns. These students received individual counseling weekly or bi-weekly by the BHS and weekly check-ins by the YSC. In addition to individual counseling, group counseling was used to discuss topics of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns for the students to understand more about the topics and help them realize that they were not alone. Group and individual counseling, check-ins, and intervention meetings catered to each participant's offense or reason for referral. Tier 2 participants were anticipated to complete/graduate their MAPS participation within four months or one school semester with five to eight check-ins with MAPS staff. Participation duration was left open and tracked separately for each participant.

Tier 3. Participants were referred to tier 3 for major behavioral issues, drug use, alcohol use, gang involvement, violent behaviors, and involvement with law enforcement. Interventions included group and individual counseling, check-ins, intervention meetings that cater to a participant's offense or reason for referral, referral to treatment centers if necessary, and other violence reduction measures. Participants received counseling by the BHS and weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with YSC and SRO. Group discussions were a key activity for tier 3 participants. Topics included verbal abuse, physical abuse, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, aggression, gang awareness, and other concerns and needs of the group. Planned individualized trips catered to a participant's goals, such as tours of trade schools, colleges, and different occupations nominated by the participants. The goal of tier 3 activities was to divert participants from behaviors that may get them into trouble and have them focus on what they can do to accomplish their goals. Tier 3 participants were anticipated to complete/graduate their MAPS participation within six months to two school semesters with weekly check-ins with MAPS staff. Participation duration was left open and tracked separately for each participant.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

The evaluation approach of MAPS was guided by principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and asset-based community development (ABCD). The external local evaluator worked with the MAPS Team to develop and refine local evaluation plan (LEP), select, develop and adapt measures to the local context of MAPS, and periodically reflect on quantitative and qualitative findings and lessons during team meetings. The evaluation approach assumed that the relevance, rigor, and reach of evaluation activities and products are better when community members engaged with the evaluation goals participate as partners and collaborators in the evaluation (not solely as subjects of measurement). The experiences, wisdom, and relationships of MAPS, schools, and community members were essential to understanding and improving MAPS implementation and results. The MAPS Team leaders (YSC and BHS) managed the collection and organization of all data, with support from the local evaluator for training and quality assurance related to measurement. Evaluation meetings were used to develop tools and procedures that were culturally and linguistically appropriate and sensitive to age, limited English proficiency, and literacy level. Evaluation methods were adapted for participants who may require special assistance, have literacy challenges, and need other support to participate fully in evaluation activities. The YSC led the preparation of CalVIP quarterly reports and the management of reporting activities. The local evaluator led the development of the final report, working closely with the MAPS Team to incorporate lessons from quarterly reports and team meetings.



Logic Model

The MAPS Logic Model guided the evaluation. MAPS aimed to accomplish three goals between October 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023.

Goal 1. The City of Gustine, through the Youth Services Bureau of the Gustine Police Department, will increase active prevention of justice involvement.

Objectives:

1. Create a Youth Services Bureau in the Gustine Police Department.
2. Provide three training sessions for school staff members.
3. Hold nine parent education meetings (three per year).
4. Oversee program development and execution by the Advisory Council and Grant Leadership Team.

Goal 2. The City of Gustine will reduce the number of absences, in-house and off-site suspensions, expulsions, and violence in the Gustine Unified School District.

Objectives:

1. Decrease the number of truanancies by 20%.
2. Decrease the number of suspensions by 20%.
3. Provide over 2,500 students and parents with age-appropriate presentations.
4. Offer 300 students behavior health services (estimated at 100 per year).

Goal 3. The City of Gustine will reduce youth violence in Gustine.

Objectives:

1. Decrease youth justice involvement by 25%.
2. Divert 75 justice-involved and at-risk youth through intensive support services and counseling (estimated 25 annually).

The program logic model is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. MAPS Logic Model

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
<p>1 Gustine Police Department (GPD) officer (School Resources Officer/SRO) providing group workshops</p> <p>1 Behavioral Health Specialist (BHS) providing individual counseling</p> <p>1 Youth Services Coordinator (YSC)</p> <p>GUSD provides space & participants for all program activities</p> <p>GPD car/van</p> <p>Needs pantry (school & personal supplies)</p> <p>Explorer Program & CalVIP funds for extracurricular activities</p> <p>Partnerships with Probation</p> <p>Community leaders serving in Grant Leadership Team, Advisory Council, youth mentors, career direction, & job opportunities</p>	<p>Organize and maintain Advisory Council</p> <p><u>All-School Interventions</u> Presentations at assemblies & smaller events on positive life choices, risk factor prevention & reduction</p> <p><u>Tier Interventions</u> A.) Group meetings & events</p> <p>B.) Individual counseling</p> <p>C.) Field trips & Workshops</p> <p>2-day Fire & Water Workshop (1 per year)</p> <p>Field trips (tailored to youth goals)</p>	<p>Up to 10 organizations & individual leaders supporting program success</p> <p>2,000+ parents & students over 3 years</p> <p>150 youth over 3 years (50 per year participating)</p> <p>75 youth (25 per year)</p> <p>25 youth per workshop</p>	<p>Student, staff & parent participate at assemblies & smaller events</p> <p>Participant surveys show change in knowledge, attitudes & behaviors indicating MAPS effects (less disruptive behavior, being involved in law, decreased drug use)</p>	<p>75 youth are diverted from the justice system (25 per year)</p> <p>Anxiety, depression, behavioral health & coping skills improve for youth in tiers</p> <p>Youth in tiers show improvement in truancy, suspension, disruptive behavior, violence, crime, & pro-social behaviors</p>	<p>Youth in tiers achieve at least 1 personal longer-term goal</p> <p>School graduation rates increase</p> <p>School truancy and suspension rates decrease</p> <p>Youth enrollment in post-secondary training & education increase</p> <p>Youth employment rates increase</p> <p>City of Gustine youth-age crime and violence rates decrease</p>

Guiding Evaluation Questions

The evaluation plan answered four questions to understand and support the MAPS goals.

1. How does MAPS contribute to achieving its goals and objectives?

Question 1 guided measurement and analysis of MAPS short-, medium- and longer-term outcomes.

2. How is MAPS creating and implementing its planned interventions and activities?

Question 2 informed the evaluation of MAPS processes and fidelity with planned interventions.

3. What factors and conditions affect MAPS implementation and success?

Question 3 guided ongoing MAPS team reflections and technical assistance to critique how well the program is progressing with its goals and objectives and how it may redirect its efforts to improve success.

4. How can MAPS interventions that work and have positive results be strengthened and sustained?

Question 4 guided ongoing MAPS team reflections and technical assistance to build on evidence-based practices and findings of program effectiveness and to identify ways to sustain and grow what works beyond grant funding.

Evaluation Design and Methods

A quasi-experimental study design was planned to inform the four guiding questions. The design components included:

- 1) Measurement of pre-post intervention change in program outcomes within GUSD schools.
- 2) Measurement of pre-post intervention change in program outcomes within MAPS participants.
- 3) Comparison of change among MAPS participants, non-participants, and Youth Services Bureau youth for each GUSD school (contingent on availability of comparative data).
- 4) Qualitative and quantitative methods to document the unique emergence and unfolding of MAPS at each school and offer comparative insights on how MAPS may contribute to improvements in outcomes for specific participants and each school.

Components of the evaluation design were adapted over time based on data availability and access and program resources. These adaptations are described throughout the methods and results.

Measurement

MAPS measurement tools and procedures used pre-existing GUSD and First Behavioral Health protocols and organizational data systems (e.g., GUSD and First Behavioral Health client databases, PHQ-9, GAD-7). Newly created forms and procedures are described here. Three outcomes were assessed, each linked to the goals in the MAPS Logic Model.

Outcome 1. Build a Justice Involvement Relationship with Schools

Measurement.

1. Assess the creation and maintenance of a Youth Services Bureau in the Gustine Police Department. This includes the hiring and sustaining of a Youth Services Coordinator.
2. Assess the provision of program training for school staff, students, and parents.
3. Assess the creation and maintenance of two program oversight teams: the Advisory Council and the Grant Leadership Team.

The YSC used a Program Tracking Log (journal) to document meetings, trainings, events, and other activities. The MAPS Team and local evaluator periodically reviewed journal results during meetings to support program changes and progress.

A Participant Survey was created to get feedback about program training and events (e.g., parent training, school assemblies). The survey included a 5-point Likert scale to assess changes in goals related to the training (e.g., knowledge, intentions, satisfaction) and qualitative items for participant reflections and recommendations for program improvement (e.g., what worked best, suggested improvements). The Participant Survey was designed to be brief (5 to 10 minutes) and completed by pen and paper. Spanish translation of the survey was available when needed.

Process Evaluation. Process evaluation for Outcome 1 included sign-in sheets and other check-in methods (for online interactions like Zoom meetings) to count participation at all meetings and events. The YSC organized information from sign-in sheets in an Excel file. Participation results were examined monthly to assess progress with participation goals and modify program actions to support the program.

Outcome 2. Reduce School Violence Prevention Risk Factors

Measurement.

1. Assess changes in school truancy rates (target decrease of 20% over the program period).
2. Assess changes in school suspension rates (target decrease of 20% over the program period).

School truancy and suspension rates were retrieved from school records in aggregate annually from Data Quest. School records were unavailable as originally planned for monthly analysis, adjusting for known student confounders (e.g., gender, age, race/ethnicity, and free-reduced meal program eligibility).

Process Evaluation. Process evaluation for Outcome 2 included the Program Tracking Log and Participant Survey described in Outcome 1, and sign-in sheets. Sign-in sheets were used to track participation in age-appropriate presentations to students and parents (target of 2,500 participants during the grant period). The YSC and BHS worked with schools to track appropriate referrals and receipt of students to behavioral health services using a Services Referral Log. The BHS used the GAT-7 and PHQ9-Youth during counseling sessions to track the prevalence of depression.

Outcome 3. Reduce Community Youth Violence

Measurement.

1. Assess changes in youth justice involvement among youth participating in the program's diversion interventions (target decrease of 25% over the program period). Youth justice involvement was measured for MAPS participants using secondary data from juvenile hall records in aggregate. Originally planned to occur monthly, this was adapted to occur quarterly with the preparation of quarterly reports based on youth exiting the program. Variables representing youth justice involvement include document discipline actions at school, suspension, warnings, and arrests.

Process Evaluation. Process evaluation for Outcome 3 included the Program Tracking Log, Participant Survey, and sign-in sheets for MAPS activities, events, and services. Where appropriate data were available, analysis of process evaluation data were used to understand how the degree of program participation may have affected youth justice involvement.

Beyond the measures described above, focus groups were planned with students and parents to better understand the potential contributions of MAPS and recommendations for improvement. One set of focus groups was planned for summer of 2022 (roughly midway through the grant period) and one for summer 2023 (after grant activities were completed). The first set of focus groups in summer of 2022 were not completed due to difficulty in recruiting enough participants (e.g., at least 6 per group of parents and students). One focus group with four participants was completed in the summer of 2023. This focus group was conducted in Spanish with a translator.

As appropriate, the MAPS team and local evaluator worked together to implement best practices in evaluation, adapt tools and methods for culture, language, and literacy, and develop procedures that would increase the reliability and accuracy of data and results. Tailoring for culture, language, and literacy was important given Gustine's larger Spanish-speaking Latino community.

Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted as appropriate to each data source. Quantitative analyses – as from surveys and secondary aggregate data – included descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency, central tendency) and comparisons across groups and over time where possible. Qualitative analyses – as from project journaling, focus groups and project meetings – examined themes and unique patterns in ideas and other narrative content.

Some Limitations and Consideration When Interpreting the Findings

The evaluation design lacked a valid control or comparison group for MAPS interventions. This enables an understanding of how MAPS may have contributed to changes in process and outcome measures but not if MAPS participation caused those changes. Other factors and conditions along with and separately from MAPS participation, may have influenced the results.

All measures that required participant actions in the evaluation were voluntary. People participating in evaluation activities were not randomly selected or assigned to certain conditions or groups, nor were they forced to participate. Therefore, the evaluation results may be biased because people who voluntarily participated differed from those who did not volunteer. For example, people who voluntarily answered a survey and said MAPS helped them may have been more favorable to the program than people who did not volunteer to complete the survey.

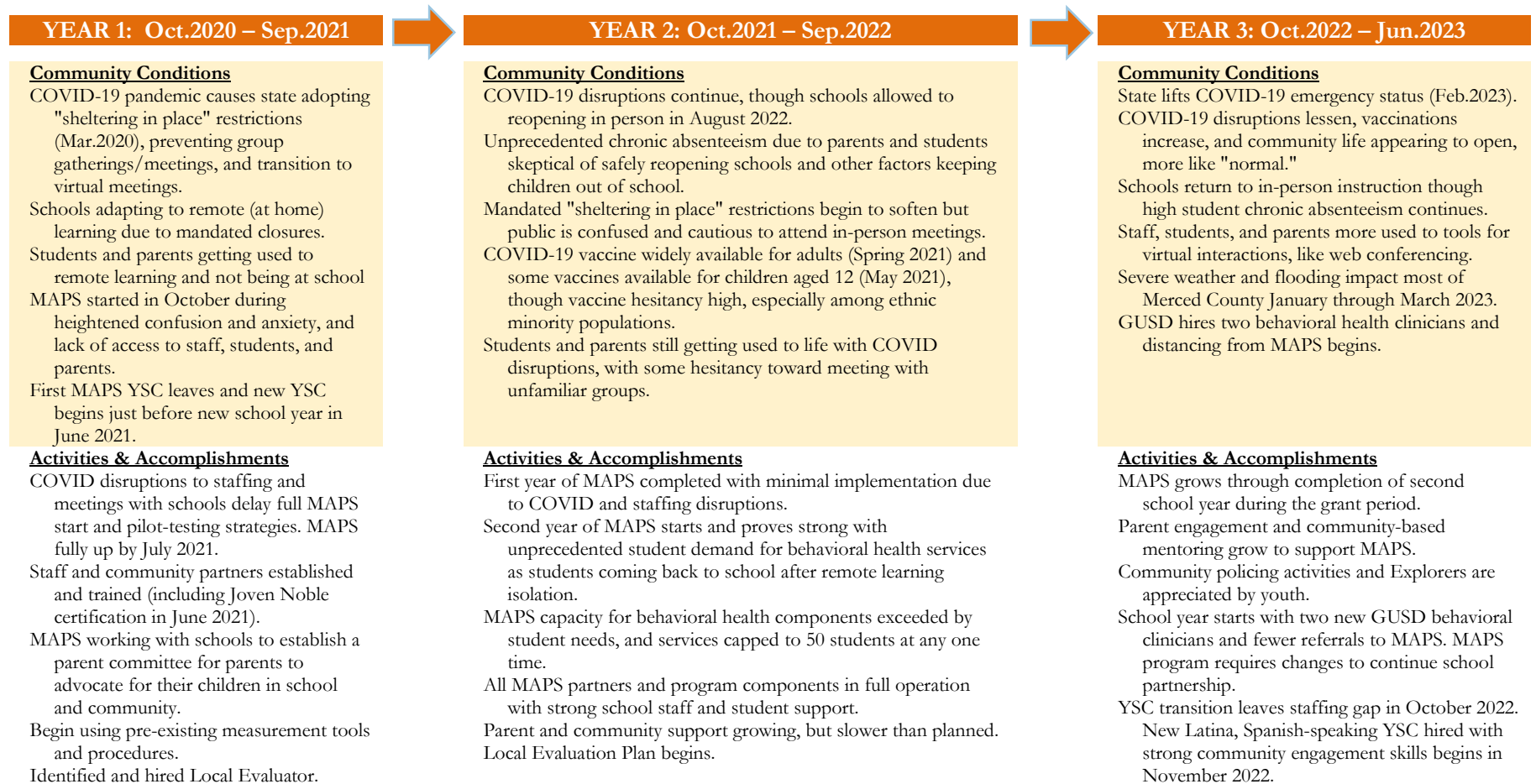
Two other conditions affected the evaluation. First, staff changes during the project may have interfered with implementing all evaluation activities on time or as planned. For example, the YSC position changed toward the end of the first year and at the beginning of the third year. This position was central to MAPS administration, including data collection and organization. Staff shortages and transitions in all schools may have affected the quality of student-related data. Second, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the evaluation in at least two ways. MAPS participants may have been unable to complete assessments (e.g., due to illness and chronic absenteeism in schools during reopening). COVID-related disruptions in all public agencies, including schools, were known to prevent data collection and affect the quality of data collection with students.



PROGRAM RESULTS

The 3-year implementation of MAPS was successful despite unique barriers (e.g., a pandemic and severe weather), and challenges more common to smaller, under-resourced communities (e.g., staffing transitions, engaging working parents). The timeline below shows the MAPS journey with some key milestones and accomplishments.

Timeline of Key MAPS Activities, Accomplishments, and Community Conditions



Guiding Questions 1 and 2

1. How did MAPS contribute to the achievement of its goals and objectives?
2. How did MAPS create and implement its planned interventions and activities?

Outcome 1. Build a Justice Involvement Relationship with Schools

1. Create a Youth Services Bureau (YSB) in the Gustine Police Department.
2. Provide three training sessions for school staff members.
3. Hold nine parent education meetings (three per year).
4. Oversee program development and execution by the Advisory Council (AC) and Grant Leadership Team (GLT).

MAPS fully achieved Outcome 1 with several direct indicators of a justice involvement relationship with schools.

All operational teams (YSB, AC, GLT) were established and maintained throughout the grant.

The YSB was formed during the grant development to establish relationships with collaborative decision-making to shape the project before funding. This pre-funding process ensured that the CalVIP and MAPS goals were shared by GUSD and GPD, and their accomplishment would mutually benefit schools and law enforcement. The YSB continued to meet throughout the project to ensure school and law enforcement collaboration in Gustine. The AC began at the start of the grant in 2020 and the GLT began in October 2021, at the start of the second year of the grant. Each team provided opportunities for school and law enforcement staff to develop trusting relationships, share goals and strategies, and co-own MAPS.

Three different YSCs were hired during the grant. The most stable and longest YSC served from June 2021 through September 2022. This period was also the most intense and productive period of MAPS during the three years. Most of the first year was severely impacted by COVID-19 disruptions to schools and families. Most of the last year was impacted by a shift in MAPS role with schools after GUSD hired behavioral clinicians. The third year was impacted by fewer referrals from schools and strained access to parents through the schools. To close out the program, MAPS filled the YSC position with Spanish-speaking Latina with strong connections to the area. The new YSC was able to engender meaningful MAPS connections with families through more community-based events.

These operational teams requiring co-ownership were important for developing and sustaining justice involvement relationships with all Gustine schools. The start of the last school year during the grant (August 2022) introduced challenges requiring the leadership of these operational teams. GUSD hired two behavioral clinicians whose responsibilities seemed to duplicate MAPS behavioral health services. This led to discussions about how MAPS was a complement, not a replacement, for school resources. The relationships established by the AC and YSB teams were important for these discussion leading to program changes most benefiting students.

Exceeded training goals for school staff and parents.

Presentations to describe the purpose, services, and partnership opportunities with MAPS were important to developing a culture supportive of partnership between schools, parents, and law enforcement. The MAPS team met and exceeded quarterly and overall grant goals for three presentations to school staff and three to parents throughout the grant. These presentations introduced and raised awareness for topics such as restorative justice, preventing gang involvement, preventing substance use, and supporting youth decisions for academic performance and healthy development.

Engaging parents was a challenge throughout the grant. Reaching parents of MAPS students with a higher violence risk level (Tier 3) continued to be difficult throughout the grant. Despite the potential benefit of MAPS, these families faced social and economic challenges that deprioritized MAPS. Barriers to parent engagement included limited English proficiency and dual-parent working families. The schools were the best place to reach and engage parents because parents trusted schools. School closures due to COVID and social-distancing requirements interfered with school-based parent engagement. The early COVID pandemic increased tension between communities and their local police departments. For example, the death of George Floyd due to police force (widely shared in social media), increased mistrust and distance from law enforcement in the first year of MAPS. Traditional cultural stigma for behavioral health services among Latinos added to challenges in reaching parents and students.

The MAPS Team consistently built trust with parents, most of whom were Latino and many who preferred to speak Spanish. This included providing presentations at times and places convenient to parents (e.g., back-to-school and parent nights), using Spanish-speaking interpreters and translators, offering events outdoors (for COVID-prevention, movie nights in the park), meeting parents at "school coffees with the principal," doing street interviews and surveys, and reaching parents through the radio and social media. Among the most important strategies was working with GUSD to develop and support a Parent Committee, launched in the spring school semester of 2022 at the height of MAPS activity during the grant. Led by Spanish-speaking parents, the Parent Committee was valued for more direct and successful outreach to parents. The committee increased the number of parents who came to MAPS activities and encouraged their children to do so. During the 2022-2023 school year, when the middle and high schools decreased referrals to MAPS due to the hiring of school behavioral health clinicians, the Parent Committee continued to help MAPS connect with parents.



Key Lessons. Creating and supporting formal operational structures with schools, the police department, and parents helped build sustainable relationships to support juvenile involvement relationships with schools. These structures, like the Advisory Council and Parent Committee, offered stability and peer-based support beyond individual relationships with staff, parents, and community members. Also, these structures provided a certain level of authority and power that was important for decision-making and negotiating resources, contributing to the successful implementation of MAPS.

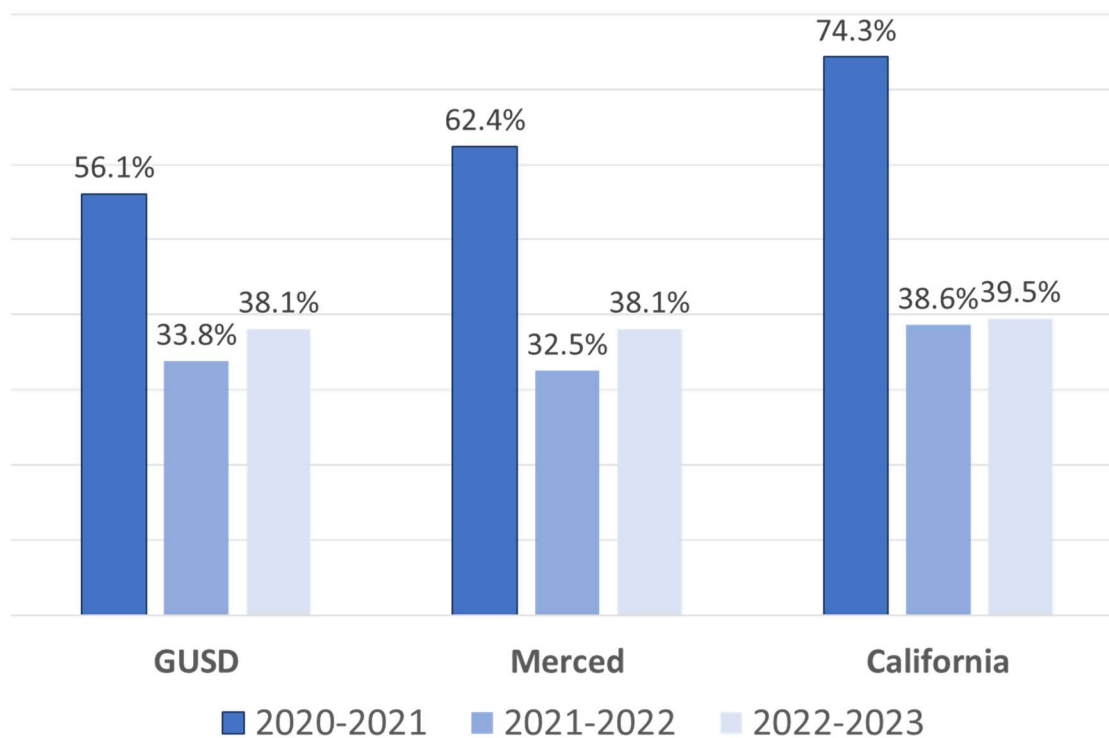
Outcome 2. Reduce School Violence Prevention Risk Factors

1. Decrease the number of truancies by 20%.
2. Decrease the number of suspensions by 20%.
3. Provide over 2,500 students and parents with age-appropriate presentations.
4. Offer 300 students behavior health services (estimated at 100 per year).

MAPS partially completed the objectives in Outcome 2.

Decreasing Truancies. The California Department of Education (CDE) defines a student as truant if they miss more than 30 minutes of instruction without an excuse three times during the school year. CDE provides publicly available data on unexcused absences, which may be used as an approximation for truancy. Because truancy requires at least three unexcused absences, truancy rates would be assumed lower than but following a similar trend to the rate of unexcused absences. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students with one or more unexcused absences for GUSD, and all school districts in Merced County and the state for three academic years during the grant period.

Figure 1. Percent of Students with One or More Unexcused Absences, 2020 – 2023
Gustine Unified School District with County and State Comparisons



Source: DataQuest (<https://dq.cde.ca.gov>)

The pattern across all three comparison levels is similar, showing a noticeable reduction in unexcused absenteeism when schools resumed in-person instruction after being locked down at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in GUSD as in the county and state, the percentage of unexcused absences increased slightly in the last school year of the grant.

The MAPS Team noted challenges with absenteeism throughout the grant. MAPS and the schools worked hard to help more students come to school. The MAPS Team discussed the importance of school attendance with participants during counseling and educational events and with students and parents. MAPS staff made personal contact with participants and, where appropriate, made home visits to ensure students were safe and could attend school. The challenges of absenteeism and truancy were affecting schools nationwide.

Decreasing Suspensions. Similarly to progress on truanancies, impacting suspensions was challenging following the effect of COVID school closures. Unprecedented rates of behavioral problems and violence were reported by schools throughout the US when students returned to in-person instruction following months of remote learning. Closing schools prevented students from interacting with their peers and educators and increased anxiety and risk-taking behaviors (e.g., substance use and violence). These challenges burdened the re-opening schools leading to greater violence and suspensions in schools. The data in Table 1 illustrate these consequences.

Name	Cumulative Enrollment	Total Suspensions	Violent Incident (Injury)	Violent Incident (No Injury)	Weapons Possession	Illicit Drug Related	Defiance Only	Other Reasons
2020-2021	1,867	15	1	8	2	4	0	0
2021-2022	1,871	158	46	66	5	30	10	1
2022-2023	1,871	126	18	69	4	26	2	7

The jump from 15 suspensions in 2020-2021 (schools closed with remote learning) to 158 (schools reopen with social distancing and COVID-prevention measures) offers a picture of what GUSD school staff and MAPS were experiencing. The immense volume of student needing behavioral health support far outweighed the capacity of schools and MAPS staff. No one could have anticipated and prepared for this degree of suspension.

Throughout the grant period, a constant factor influencing students' lives overall and suspensions specifically was the influence of gangs in Gustine. The MAPS Team saw a pattern with students experiencing higher risks for violence and having more interactions with gangs. Gang influence was an ongoing fight and the main cause of most truancy and suspension/expulsion cases seen by MAPS staff. This included things like gang-affiliated clothing, drawings, tagging, fighting, or exchange of words.

Seeing the growing influence of gangs in the community, the MAPS Team shifted its focus to deal with these outside influences (home and community) affecting students. This included increasing

MAPS engagement with parents. Trying to reach students involved with gangs was extremely difficult. They did not attend school, their parental involvement was poor, and when MAPS staff attempted home visits, the students were not home or would run away. The MAPS Team understood the issues with the gang culture in Gustine and surrounding areas. MAPS staff provided several gang presentations to parents to help them be aware of what signs to look for in their students if they feel as if they are becoming gang-involved. Preventive presentations to students were provided on bullying, fighting, gang awareness, and other similar topics. Gang-involved youth participated in the Joven Noble program offered by MAPS staff to help steer youth away from gang culture.

Since schools reopened in Fall 2021, GUSD relaxed suspending students to encourage them to stay in school. Measures, such as the school attendance review board (SARB) and referrals to MAPS mitigated suspensions. Instead of suspension, students were referred to MAPS for counseling and mentoring, which seemed helpful. Among the first students exiting MAPS in 2021, at least one student was diverted from suspension. Through the 2021-2022 school year, the MAPS Team saw participants reduce their depression or anxiety and reduce their risk for involvement with law enforcement. The MAPS behavioral health specialist (BHS) played a substantial role in counseling students at risk for suspension. GPD officers mentored students to help them make better decisions, leading them to stay in school and avoid getting into trouble when out of school.

Throughout the grant period, the MAPS Team experienced many situations with students, including students at risk for suspension, showing improvements in behaviors to stay in school, avoid gangs, and develop habits to be healthy and away from violence. The overall suspension rate at GUSD did not decrease in MAPS's two most active years. Reducing suspensions at a district-wide level will require more time and ongoing effort.



Reaching 2,500 Students and Parents with Age-Appropriate Presentations. When this goal of the proposal for MAPS was set in early 2020, no one could have imagined schools closing, state mandates preventing group meetings, and other strange consequences of a pandemic. At that time, conducting meetings and workshops through webinars was something for wealthier businesses, not for parents and young children living in areas with weak or no Internet connection at home. The MAPS Team nearly met the target with over 2,200 students and parents reached by presentations during the grant period. In the project's first year, the MAPS Team developed presentations, materials and outreach methods to engage students and parents while meeting social distancing requirements and avoiding large group meetings. By September 2021, when the new school year began, over 1,000 students and parents had been reached. Nearly 1,800 participants were reached by December 2022, but the reach to parents was weakened in the last two quarters. This was partly due to the changing relationship between MAPS and schools due GUSD hiring school-based behavioral clinicians.

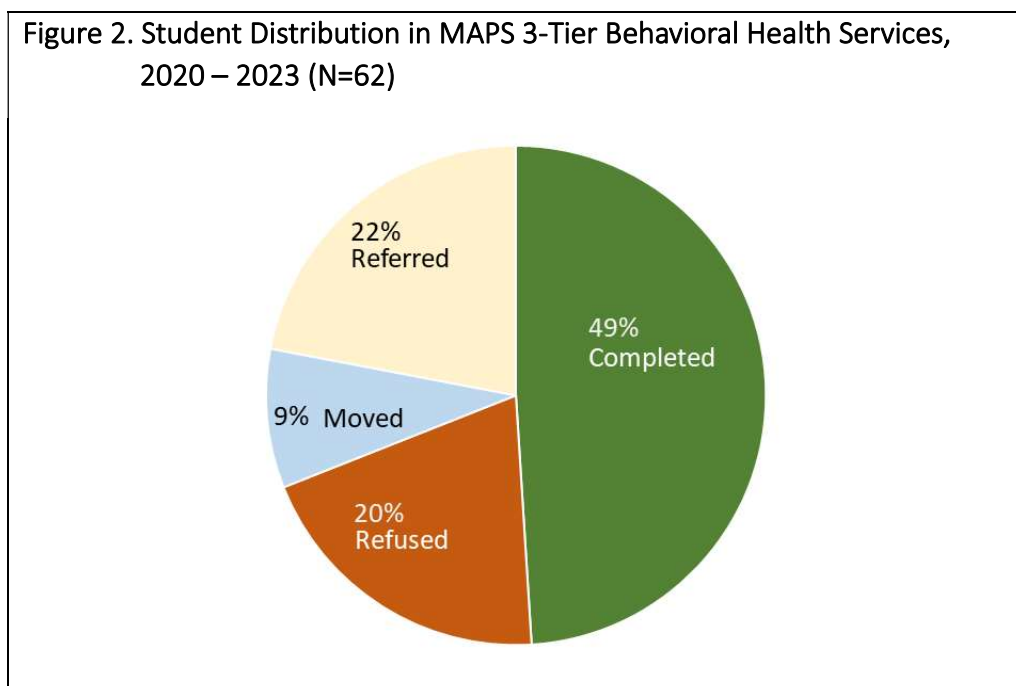
Age-appropriate presentation for students included topics such as bullying, truancies, drugs, alcohol, violence, depression, and anxiety. With the help of the GPD and the School Resource Officer, MAPS included presentations on gangs and gang violence. Parents were provided presentations on similar topics but with different information more relevant to them. For example, the gang presentations for parents focused on identifying signs of gang involvement and how to prevent and address gang involvement as a parent. Other presentation topics for parents included phone safety for children and addressing bullying, fighting, sexual harassment, drug abuse, tobacco and vaping, and related concerns.

MAPS staff worked closely with staff from each school to tailor presentations to their needs. With input from school staff and parents, MAPS staff prepared preventive presentations based on what parents and school staff saw among their students. For example, MAPS staff organized an entire month of preventive presentations based on the topic of drug use and vaping/tobacco use. Presentations include fentanyl awareness, drug abuse and mental health, and vaping and tobacco awareness. As needed, presentations were provided in Spanish directly or through an interpreter. Presentations related to gang involvement, drug awareness, and mental health awareness were the most well-received presentations, according to surveys and personal feedback from parents and administrators.

Offering 300 Students Behavior Health Services (estimated at 100 per year). This objective was reached halfway by the end of the grant period, with approximately 150 students offered behavioral health services through June 2022. GUSD hired two behavioral clinicians in Spring 2022. This prevented MAPS staff from providing services on the school sites and receiving referrals from schools for behavioral health. What was encouraging about this objective was reaching so many students with one year's time. When MAPS started, schools were closed due to COVID-19. Students were offered behavioral health services through First Behavior Health Urgent Care. When schools reopened in the 2021-2022 school year, MAPS was flooded with referrals, which led to exceeding the 100-student goal for services. As indicated in the results about suspensions, schools were overwhelmed with behavioral health incidents in the 2021-2022

school year. The MAPS Team received referrals for students who needed care beyond what MAPS could offer. Students were referred to partners like the Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services and Aspiranet. MAPS staff set a cap for serving 50 students to make the best use of program resources. By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, MAPS was recognized by schools, students, and parents as a trusted behavioral health resource.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of students enrolled in the MAPS 3-tier Response to Intervention services. Students graduated the program as "completed" after successfully completing or improving what they were referred for. Four students completed the program two times. Twenty-two percent of students were referred to other programs because they required assistance other than what was offered by MAPS.



The students in tiered services had the following demographics:

- 81% were male
- 59% Hispanic/Latino, 19% White, 4% American Indian, and 8% not reported
- 35% were in Elementary School, 23% Middle School, and 42% High School
- All but one student lived with a parent (one lived with their grandparents)
- One student had informal involvement with law enforcement

Of the 26 students who completed the program at least once, 35% were in Tier 1 (minor behavioral issues), 54% were in Tier 2 (moderate behavioral issues), and 12% were in Tier 3 (major behavioral issues). All students received tier services that were age-appropriate and culturally and linguistically appropriate. Services included case management, cognitive behavioral

therapy, training in conflict resolution, anger management, violence avoidance, social-emotional learning, life skills, healthy choices, and family management. Tiers 2 and 3 students also received trauma-informed care and engaged in restorative justice practices.

Several positive outcomes resulted as measured by assessment of students during counseling sessions and through school records.

2 students showed a reduction in suspensions and 2 a reduction in expulsions prior to MAPS. During the 2021-2022 mass increase in suspensions, GUSD reduced the criteria for suspension and referred students to MAPS rather than suspending them. This may have reduced the ability to detect the true impact of MAPS on reducing suspensions.

13 students demonstrated progress in overcoming victimization, depression and anxiety as measured by the behavioral health specialist (using GAT-7 and PHQ-9, and cognitive behavioral therapy methods)

6 students demonstrated a reduction in risk for justice involvement and violence, including behaviors related to gang involvement and improved classroom behavior

Only 1 student was informally involved with law enforcement before entering MAPS. This student demonstrated improvement in decision-making to avoid participation in violence and crime (usually attributed to gang involvement in Gustine). There was no contact with law enforcement during the grant period.

Input during parent meetings and the parent focus group at the end of the project complemented the outcomes found from MAPS tiered behavioral health services. Parents of students across school levels reported improvements in their children's anger management and discipline, participation in school and grade improvements, service to others (including involvement in school clubs and community policing events), and improvements in making friends and having fun. Students enjoyed participating in the Joven Noble activities, school field trips, and community events that brought people together (e.g., BBQs, health fairs). School staff noted similar improvements among students and continued to heavily refer students to MAPS through June 2022 before GUSD hired behavioral clinicians. Parents commented on their concerns that MAPS was ending, and they and their children would miss the MAPS approach.



Outcome 3. Reduce Community Youth Violence

1. Decrease youth justice involvement by 25%.
2. Divert 75 justice-involved and at-risk youth through intensive support services and counseling (estimated 25 annually).

MAPS's cumulative and synergistic efforts may have contributed to an overall reduction in youth justice involvement. GPD reports showed 15 juvenile arrests during the 2021-2022 school year, down from 26 in 2019-2020 before MAPS. Juvenile arrests decreased by 73%. This positive outcome occurred during continued gang activity in Gustine and an astronomical 953% increase in suspensions between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (including 45 times greater suspensions due to violence resulting in injury). As indicated earlier, MAPS did not have the capacity to serve all students in need when schools reopened from COVID-19. Services were capped at 50 students per semester. Challenges in reaching and following students who did not fully complete MAPS (e.g., moved or were referred out) prevent knowing if 75 or more students were diverted from further school and law enforcement disciplinary actions. At least 26 students who successfully completed the tiered services avoided further suspensions, expulsions, and involvement with law enforcement. The program evaluation results show that it is likely that the MAPS tiered/targeted and general interventions contributed to positive changes among participants, which may have influenced the overall community level of youth justice involvement.

Guiding Question 3. What factors and conditions affected MAPS implementation and success?

The MAPS Team reflected on what contributed to their progress and success during team meetings and meetings with the YBS, AC, and GLT groups, and, more formally, during three semi-structured team interviews at the end of the project. Notes from participant surveys and the parent focus group also offered ideas about what made MAPS work. Lessons from these reflections fall into three categories.

1. Nurturing positive school-community-police relationships.

MAPS's overall premise and principle was that police are partners in improving community safety. The police's primary role is not catching and punishing crime. Throughout MAPS (including its pre-grant development), the City of Gustine, the Gustine Police Department (GPD), and the Gustine Unified School District (GUSD) worked closely together to set shared goals and collaborate on solutions to achieve those goals. To establish these relationships, GDP (as the lead for MAPS) worked hard to be present in the community and schools and create a more welcoming environment for the community and students at the police department. MAPS staff and police officers consistently attended school and community events (not only for their own events). This included principal-parent coffees, back-to-school and parent nights, and community celebrations. A Needs Pantry was created at the police department and made easily accessible to students and the community to access free food, clothing, and other basic needs. MAPS staff led field trips outside of Gustine to arts and nature. For many students, this was the first time outside Gustine (e.g., field trip to the Gallo Center). Rather than creating its own parent group, MAPS staff worked with schools and parents to develop and support a parent-led Parent Committee. This was led by bilingual parents who shared the goal of better school-community-police relationships. MAPS served as a convener and catalyst, bringing the community, schools, and the police closer together around the shared purpose of improving opportunities for youth.

2. Destigmatizing behavioral health services.

The stigma that behavioral health services are for people who are insane or very sick is longstanding. This stigma was current throughout the grant, especially for the Latino community. MAPS worked at all schools, reaching children as young as six. MAPS provided activities and services for students without a need to prove a behavioral health risk as well as tiered-intensity behavioral health services. MAPS worked with school staff to offer a referral process, giving students the choice to participate. MAPS was free and included services at the school, the police department, and the community (e.g., a community fair for Mental Health Services Day). These and other approaches led MAPS behavioral health services to be seen as something positive to be part of rather than a service you need because you are sick or something is wrong with you. These conditions destigmatized behavioral health services, allowing more students and parents to participate in MAPS activities.

3. Team flexibility and creativity.

The MAPS goals to improve justice involvement relationships in schools and reduce violence in heavily gang-influenced areas were not easy for a small, rural city. These goals were made more challenging by the unprecedented natural disasters (the pandemic, extreme weather, and flooding) throughout the grant period. Implementing MAPS successfully was credited to the creativity and flexibility of the team in handling obstacles and creating opportunities. When schools were closed and social distancing was mandated, MAPS staff held events outdoors (e.g., park movie night, park BBQs, outdoor sports). When schools and the program were overloaded with behavioral health crises, MAPS staff worked with public and private partners to help with the load. When reaching parents was difficult because of work schedules and cultural and linguistic barriers, MAPS staff nurtured the creation of the parent-led Parent Committee, where trusted parents served as ambassadors for MAPS, and advocates for their children. In May 2022 GUSD hired behavioral clinicians to lead schools' behavioral health services. This hiring occurred without warning to MAPS and confused the MAPS role as a partner and community resource. MAPS staff negotiated with GUSD to keep its relationships with students and parents and pivoted to more community-based behavioral health activities. These are some examples of how the MAPS Team navigated around problems to ensure the implementation and success of MAPS.

*“MAPS brought hope to the community
– students and parents know when someone cares.”
- A reflection from a teammate during a meeting.*

Guiding Question 4. How can MAPS interventions that work and have positive results be strengthened and sustained?

MAPS was designed to be a collaborative program between the school district and the police department. Its design and implementation relied on city, school, and police department administration and staff committing to working together for the referral, intervention, and evaluation processes. The introduction of GUSD behavioral health clinicians at the end of the 2021-2022 school year led to disruptions in how MAPS worked as a bridge between schools, the community, and law enforcement. Staff from schools, GPD, and MAPS worked to resolve these disruptions through a new referral process to MAPS for parents and students. However, by the end of the grant activity period (June 2023), the MAPS partners determined that formal MAPS activities would end, and MAPS components would be transitioned to other programs in schools and the community. MAPS staff began to help parents find alternative sources of support. The GPD remained a resource with open doors for parents and students.

Other communities may wish to build and strengthen a justice involvement relationship with schools. They, too, could adopt and tailor the MAPS general educational activities and the 3-tier

behavioral health services model. Successful transfer of these interventions will likely depend on their attention to the factors contributing to success discussed in Guiding Question 3: nurturing positive school-community-police relationships, destigmatizing behavioral health services, and team flexibility and creativity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Between 2020 and 2023, MAPS successfully provided general education to students, parents, and school staff and tailored behavioral health services to elementary, middle, and high school students. These efforts contributed to measurable reductions in youth and community violence. While the 73% reduction in juvenile arrests during this period cannot be fully attributed to MAPS, sufficient evidence exists that MAPS influenced school staff, students, parents, law enforcement, and the broader community to promote community safety and well-being. A promising MAPS strategy was combining community- and school-wide general education activities with age-appropriate behavioral health services tiered for youth behavioral health risk. MAPS was a bridge and facilitator for ongoing collaboration between the Gustine Unified School District, the Gustine Police Department, parents, and other residents, and public agencies serving Gustine. The program's accomplishments were rooted in the ability of the MAPS Team to grow meaningful relationships with parents, school staff, students, and law enforcement. The trust within these relationships led to greater student and community engagement, creative problem-solving, viewing the police as partners for safety, and less stigma against behavioral health services.

The 3-year CalVIP grant in Gustine illustrated the potential and fragility of sustaining meaningful school-police relationships and the MAPS program. Communities seeking to adopt MAPS strategies should ensure school and law enforcement partners agree on shared accountability for program implementation and sustainability. The results and lessons from MAPS may be most relevant to smaller, rural cities, often far from public resources. However, the emphasis on trust-building across public institutions, across parents and public institutions, and on destigmatizing behavioral health would likely benefit youth violence prevention efforts in every community. MAPS established an expectation for trust between schools, law enforcement, and the community that will continue to shape youth violence prevention efforts in Gustine.



MAPS PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

One student in ninth grade was referred to MAPS based on an assessment showing a need for anger management and prevention of expulsion. The student had hit another student and was offered to participate in MAPS instead of being expelled from the school. The student successfully completed the program after showing improvement in the behaviors and risks for which he was assessed. The student participated in cognitive behavioral therapy and training on anger management, conflict resolution, violence avoidance, social-emotional learning, life skills, healthy choices, and family management. He also completed the Joven Noble program through MAPS. Joven Noble is tailored for Latino youth and young men to help reduce substance abuse, community violence, and relationship violence, and to promote responsible and respectful behavior in relationships with significant others.

Reports from MAPS staff and the student's parents indicated several important changes they attributed to his participation in MAPS. His parents explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, their son became isolated and aggressive. He began listening to music different from what he was used to, which sounded violent and angry. He often fought with his siblings and did not communicate well with his siblings and parents.

As he began and progressed through MAPS, the parents saw a "180-degree change." MAPS gave their son an outlet. It was very helpful for the student to have someone outside his family to talk with and feel like he was listened to. Before MAPS, the student was angry, and his parents were unsure where it was coming from. After MAPS, he communicated better with his sibling and his parents, was less aggressive, and even apologized to his parents.

The parents said MAPS helped their son "Get out of a dark cloud and positively engage with his family." His grades changed from Ds and Fs to As and Bs.

Participating in Joven Noble was very important to him. His father said his son would look forward to attending Joven Noble. One could see a difference when he returned from a Joven Noble event. Even his siblings benefitted from what he learned and practiced about communication and being respectful.

One other change the parents saw as a result of MAPS was their son becoming more helpful to others and being of service. He began to stay after school to help other students. He began to teach students to play guitar after school. He became a Gustine Police Department Explorer.

The participation of the student in MAPS restorative justice (preventing his expulsion) and in the personal and group interventions of MAPS substantially improved the student's relationships with his family and peers, his personal development, and his engagement in school and community service.

APPENDICES:
MEASUREMENT TOOLS FROM THE EVALUATION

Student Referral Form



Mental Health and Programming
in Schools - Gustine

REFERRAL FORM

Student Information

Date:	Referred By:
Student Name:	Date of Birth:
Student Language:	Ethnicity:
School Site:	Grade:

Parent/Guardian Information

Name of Parent/Guardian:

Address:

Phone number:

Has Student's Parent/Guardian Consent to Counseling Services for Student?

Yes No

Reason for Referral (Please mark appropriate box with an "X")

- Truancy
- Juvenile Victims
- Suspension
- Expulsion (Pending)
- School absenteeism
- Signs of trauma and/or delinquency behaviors
- Youth at risk of Justice involvement and violence
- Negative involvement with Law Enforcement

Notes:

ADD COPIES OF REFERRAL FORM, STUDENT SURVEY, PARENT SURVEY, PARENT FOCUS GROUP

Student Feedback Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What is your overall happiness right now?

1 2 3 4 5

2. What is your overall interest in extracurricular activities? (hobbies, sports, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5

3. How often do you interact with friends/ youth your age?

1 2 3 4 5

4. Do you feel as if there are negative influences in your life?

1 2 3 4 5

5. Do you feel as if there are some positive influences in your life?

1 2 3 4 5

6. Do you feel as if the M.A.P.S. program is helping you?

1 2 3 4 5

Parent Focus Group Questions (end of program focus group)

1. Why did you feel like the M.A.P.S. program was a good fit for your child?
2. What changes did you notice in your child (positive/ negative) while in the program?
3. What changes did you view in your child after completing the program? How is your child different?
4. Have you seen those changes persist after your child exited the program?
5. What did you like about the program?
6. What didn't you like about the program or things you wish the program did differently?
7. The M.A.P.S. program was run by the Gustine Police Department. How has this experience with M.A.P.S changed your view on the local police in a positive or negative way? Why?
8. What are some ways you believe the Police Department can be more involved with the community?
9. Do you think Police departments should be involved in more youth programs like these? Why?
10. How would you like the Police Department to engage youth in programs? Give examples.
11. The M.A.P.S. program was partnered with the Gustine Unified School District. How did you feel about the partnership between the police department and schools working with the program?
12. Did your view about police and law enforcement change after your child left the program? Why?
13. Thank you. That completes our questions. Would anyone like to say anything else?