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Contra Costa County Office of Education Receives Grant to Support Mental Health Services

By **Capriccia Thomas**
HEALTH EDITOR

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the struggles and issues concerning mental and behavioral health. One of the hardest-hit institutions following the epidemic was the educational system. The transition from in-person learning to complete virtual education was challenging for many students, families, and academic faculty and staff.

To mitigate the growing concern, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission awarded a four-year 6 million dollar to the Contra Costa County Office of Education in partnership with the Contra Costa

County Behavioral Services to expand mental health services to students and their families. The grant will implement programs to ensure mental health services are provided to students and their families in Contra Costa County, with over 18 districts, including 185 schools. The county will implement these services in three tiers. “First-tier is the baseline preventive behavioral training and technical assistance. Secondly, a moderate parent and caregiver support and support groups for students. Thirdly, an intensive care initiative where high-risk students are identified and provided one-one-support and direct mental health services will be given to students, parents, and caregivers in schools that require more need,” stated Marcus Walton, Director of Commu-

nication and Special Projects, Contra Costa County Office of Education. The grant will support Contra Costa County schools over the course of four years ending in 2025. The county is committed to helping students and families. “Once the grant concludes, the county will continue funding the districts to ensure mental health services are being provided,” continued Watson. Health and well-being are a significant part of the learning process. Access to mental health services will support the students and their families throughout the county. It serves as a beacon for teachers, facilitators, students, and families, a collective sense that we’re all in this together. The shared experiences will allow the schools within the district to build a

stronger community. “We believe there will be an increased understanding of how to access mental health services, foster an appreciation for the importance of mental health and wellness, increase communication and collaboration between behavioral health and the County Office of Education and school districts,” concluded Walton.

Contra Costa County will use the grant funds to establish the Wellness In Schools Program. The program will be led by liaisons, working with each county providing technical assistance and support. WISP will serve as a link for students to promptly access behavioral and mental health services. Furthermore, it seeks to build awareness and support students and their families/caregivers throughout the county.

The Service Industry Hemorrhages Workers

The Great Resignation persists, and with it, uncertainty for two-thirds of the American workforce

By **Zhanserik Temirtashev**
POLITICAL WRITER

By recent metrics, nearly 107 million Americans work in the service industry, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics February report. Since Dec 2020, many layoffs within the service industry have tapered off, with Accommodation and Food Services witnessing an immense drop from a 3.8% layoff rate in Dec. 2020 to 0.8% in Dec. 2021. Meanwhile, turnover rates of service workers have remained high since the Great Resignation, with the quit rate of accommodation and food service workers hovering around 6%.

Currently, employers are keeping pace with the nomadic workforce, as hiring rates for Nov and Dec of 2021 were recorded to be at 6.4% and 5.8%, respectively. Job opening rates were measured highest in the Accommodation and Food Services at 9.2%, followed by Healthcare and Social Assistance at 8.1%, and Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities at 7.3%. While the issue is manageable thus far, continued pressure exerted by high turnover rates may prove ultimately unsustainable.

“Employers can’t hire enough for low-wage industries,” projected Jim Araby, the Director of Strategic Campaigns of United Food and Commercial Workers Local Union 5 (otherwise, UFCW5), which represents members on the worksite and off through political advocacy. “Workers are on the frontline,” said Araby, citing that service workers are especially prone to infection and violence, a statement based on the fact that more than 15% of the 30,000 union members were infected throughout the pandemic. As a result of high exposure risks and general grievances

over working conditions, Araby stated that the union has risen in membership.

In observing the nexus between high turnover rate and limited operations under pandemic conditions, speculations of automation jeopardizing job security have blossomed; a sentiment stirred and fueled through major publications, such as the New York Times’ *Pandemic Wave of Automation May Be Bad News for Workers* article, dated July 3, 2021, and Time Magazine’s *Millions of Americans Have Lost Jobs in the Pandemic* article, dated Aug. 6, 2020. When asked if service workers believe automation poses a substantial threat to job security, Araby disagreed, claiming that deteriorating working conditions present a more tangible and poignant issue.

“The pandemic put an accelerant on automation, [although] robots haven’t replaced work, but augmented it, [in turn] decoupling skill from work, [and] making [work] more routine,” said Araby, arguing that union members are more “concerned with employers not investing in them.”

According to Araby, employers avoid allowing a 40-hour workweek for employees to save on salary and skirt around workplace benefits, such as health insurance, forcing many workers to find secondary employment. Technology will, inevitably, foster the creation of new jobs at the cost of rendering others obsolete, and to Araby, the human factor is more pressing.

To that end, Araby asserted that unions continue to be essential in preserving democracy, stating that “if people who spend a third of their life at their work don’t see representation, [how will they] outside of their work?”



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