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Outline of Comments for Panel:

"School Partnerships: Expanding Access: School-Based, Mobile & Community Health Services"

1. Introduction

- **Greeting and Context:**
 - Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this important conversation. As a school district superintendent, I'm thrilled to share how Escondido Union High School District has partnered with Neighborhood Healthcare and the Church of Rancho Bernardo to support our students' mental and emotional health.
- **The Challenge:**
 - Today, we face an increasing need to address the mental, emotional and behavioral well-being of our students. Recent data from the CDC highlights a concerning trend: 42% of high school students reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks that they stopped doing their usual activities. This is a reality that cannot be ignored.

2. Addressing the Need for Mental Health Services

- **The Rising Demand for Mental Health Support:**
 - Mental health issues among high school students have skyrocketed in recent years, especially post-pandemic. Many of our students are facing emotional challenges that impact their academic performance and overall well-being.
 - In response, Escondido Union High School District is committed to providing the necessary resources and creating supportive spaces where students can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.
- **The Role of Wellness Centers:**
 - Our Wellness Centers, now located at Escondido High, Orange Glen, and San Pasqual High Schools, serve as safe spaces where students can access mental health resources, counseling, and peer support.
 - Thanks to the Church of Rancho Bernardo, we were able to build these Wellness Centers. Their volunteer hours in framing, sheetrock, and installation helped create serene and calming spaces, which are key to supporting our students in their mental health journey.
- **Impact on Students:**

- We are proud of the success this initiative has had, with more than 2,856 individual students visiting the Wellness Centers and 42,835 total visits since the inception of the Wellness Centers. The social workers who man those Wellness Centers have performed 195 suicide risk assessments during that time, as well as 46 threat assessments. They help with issues such as grief and loss, coping skills, social skills, bereavement, basic needs, and crisis intervention.

3. Partnership with Neighborhood Healthcare

When higher levels of services are required, we rely on our partnership with Neighborhood Healthcare, which coordinates behavioral health services as referred by our Wellness Centers and school-site counselors.

- **Mobile Behavioral Health Services:**

- One of the key initiatives in addressing the growing mental health needs is our partnership with Neighborhood Healthcare (NHC), which provides a Mobile Behavioral Health Unit. This unit is a game-changer, as it provides on-site behavioral health services directly to our students, eliminating common barriers such as transportation, insurance issues, and scheduling conflicts.
- Since 2022, NHC has been providing behavioral health services at each of our high school campuses. The Mobile Unit, which is stationed near our Wellness Centers, increases our capacity to serve more students, reaching them where they are, making it easier for families to access mental health services.

- **Impact on Students:**

- The partnership with NHC has significantly reduced the waitlist for services and has created an integrated care model that includes not only behavioral health support, but also services or referrals like psychiatric care, substance use interventions, and CalFresh enrollment.
- In the last school year, 127 students were served by the NHC Behavioral Health Mobile Unit.
- High needs students—including those who are homeless, foster youth, or from low-income families—are the primary beneficiaries of these services, ensuring equitable access to care.

4. The Role of Community in Building Wellness

- **Church of Rancho Bernardo's Contribution:**

- As mentioned earlier, the Church of Rancho Bernardo has been an instrumental partner in building our Wellness Centers. Their volunteers, who donated over 140 hours of labor, helped create spaces where students can not only access mental health resources but also feel safe and supported.

- The church also contributes to other community efforts, such as providing hygiene kits, back-to-school gifts for district staff, and support for at-risk students. Their involvement has been a key part of building a culture of support for our students.
- **Why Community Matters:**
 - The success of these initiatives demonstrates that partnerships between schools and community organizations are essential for supporting our students. It is not just about the facilities or programs; it's about creating a network of care that includes educators, social workers, clinicians, and community members working together.

5. Looking Ahead: Expanding Access and Improving Outcomes

- **Plans:**
 - We're committed to expanding these services further. Our goal is to ensure that every student in our district has access to the social-emotional and behavioral health resources they need to succeed, not just academically, but emotionally and socially as well.
 - We will continue to strengthen our partnership with Neighborhood Healthcare, as we have worked with them since 2022 to extend their hours and even add additional clinicians, ensuring even more students can benefit from these critical services.
- **A Unified Effort:**
 - This is not just about providing resources; it's about building a community of care that encourages our students to seek help, feel heard, and be supported. Through these partnerships, we aim to create a holistic support system for our students' well-being.

6. Conclusion

- **Gratitude and Commitment:**
 - I am deeply grateful for the ongoing partnership with Neighborhood Healthcare and the Church of Rancho Bernardo. Together, we are making a meaningful impact in the lives of our students, and I look forward to continuing this work in the years to come.
 - Thank you for the opportunity to share our story today. I believe that through collaboration, we can continue to expand access and improve the health and well-being of our students, paving the way for their success both in school and in life.