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### **Practicum Site:**

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## Understanding and Improving Youth Behavioral Health Across Tennessee

**Introduction:** The Tennessee Together initiative and the Tennessee Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education (TN AWARE) grant address youth behavioral health across Tennessee. The primary objectives of the practicum at EMT Associates, Inc. were to: 1) solicit constructive feedback from stakeholders about the 2018-19 administration of the Tennessee Together Student Survey, 2) devise recruitment strategies to increase participation in the 2020-21 Tennessee Together Student Survey, and 3) restructure the TN AWARE Referral Pathway.

**Methods:** Feedback was solicited from substance abuse prevention coalitions (SAPCs) through a survey with a mix of Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. A brief literature review on youth substance misuse was drafted for Davidson County's application to conduct research in their public schools. Superintendents' contact information was collected for every public-school district in Tennessee. The TN AWARE Referral Pathway, housed in G Suite for Education, underwent usability testing and was modified to improve data management and functionality.

**Results:** SAPCs, alongside the Tennessee Department of Education and Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, provided invaluable feedback on how to improve the administration of the 2020-21 Tennessee Together Student Survey. One county administered the survey as of August 2020. 27 unique Referral Pathways were populated for four pilot school districts. An updated guidance manual on how to navigate the TN AWARE referral process was developed for school staff.

**Conclusions:** The practicum experience reinforced the need to monitor emerging and persistent youth behavioral health patterns at the local level. Results from the Tennessee Together Student Survey will be used to inform local and state programs and policies targeting youth substance misuse. The TN AWARE Referral Pathway will aim to meet the mental health needs of students in the four pilot school districts.