

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

COSSBA Requests



- A substantial increase in federal funding allocated to mental health services for public schools, which could be used to hire more mental health professionals, such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers or to contract with community mental health professionals to provide services for the public schools.
- Acknowledge longstanding workforce challenges in mental health through innovative training programs, loan repayment, and intensified efforts to recruit professionals into school-based and community mental health positions.
- Increase implementation and sustainable funding of effective models of school-based mental health care, including clinical strategies and models for payment – including making it easier for schools to access Medicaid supports.
- Address safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students and educators – including encouraging partnerships between schools and community-based organizations – through additional support and resources.
- Strengthen efforts to reduce the risk of suicide in children and adolescents through prevention programs in schools, primary care, and community settings.
- Acknowledge that meeting the mental health challenges impacting public schools is a shared responsibility that requires partnerships between local schools, community-based, and state agencies.

Issue History

As our nation's schools navigate the post-pandemic landscape and focus on improving student outcomes it is imperative to recognize the profound impact and challenge posed by mental health issues on the well-being of students and staff. The current mental health challenges within the public school system demand urgent attention, adequate funding, and comprehensive action. Addressing these challenges is crucial to creating a supportive environment that is conducive to learning.

A 2023 Pew Poll on Parenting in America showed that mental health topped the list of parents' concerns with 76% of respondents either extremely, very worried, or somewhat worried about their children struggling with anxiety or depression. Teen suicides have surged across the nation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates among individuals aged 15-24 have increased by 57% over the past decade, including a significant increase during the pandemic. The suicide rate among girls is nearly double that of boys. This data highlights the urgency of addressing mental health concerns among young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the mental health crisis impacting our public-school systems. Mounting evidence underscores the direct correlation between mental health and academic success. Students grappling with mental health issues are more likely to struggle academically, experience absenteeism, face challenges in building healthy peer relationships, and are more likely to abuse illegal substances. Chronic absenteeism has also significantly increased following the pandemic.

This trend places a significant burden on educators and support staff who shoulder the responsibility of providing emotional support to students. Further, mental health is a contributor to disruptive behavior in classrooms and schools. The lack of mental health resources for students and staff contributes to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and high turnover rates within the education sector. Expanding mental health services is not only critical for our students, but also an investment in the well-being of our educators, ensuring a stable and nurturing environment for all within our nation's schools.