



## Members of Congress are Urged to:

- ▶ **Provide \$1 billion for Safe Schools National Activities**, including the School-Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant programs, to address severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors).
- ▶ **Provide \$3 billion for ESSA, Title II-A** to ensure educators and early intervention providers are prepared to implement evidence-based mental health interventions.
- ▶ **Provide \$2 billion to fund ESSA, Title IV-A** to support schools and early childhood programs to hire school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists.
- ▶ **Provide \$300 million for IDEA, Part D** Personnel Preparation grants to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special educators and specialized instructional support personnel, including school-employed mental health professionals.
- ▶ Maintain the current structure and funding for Medicaid that **allows reimbursement for IDEA services**.
- ▶ **Support legislative policies that increase access to mental health services** through private health insurance and Medicaid.
- ▶ **Support policies and funding for services and community interventions** for children and youth who experience trauma, environmental stress, and mental health symptoms and disorders.
- ▶ **Support policies and funding that promote prevention and interdisciplinary partnerships** among education, early childhood, juvenile justice, mental health, and community health providers to ensure the social and emotional well-being of all children and youth.

## ISSUE BRIEF: MENTAL HEALTH Building Positive Climates for Learning

### Overview

Children and youth need strong instructional programs with caring staff to experience success in school, and infants and toddlers need well-trained professionals to help them toward developmental milestones. Equally important is ensuring access to high quality social and emotional learning programs and mental health services and supports. Professionals in schools and early childhood programs who provide evidence-based mental health services and interventions are adept at creating positive environments that support learning and a sense of belonging. Therefore, every school must have dedicated, highly qualified school mental health professionals as essential members of the school team available to work with all children.

Now more than ever—after pandemic disruptions and the spate of violent incidents in schools—children, youth, staff, and families need access to mental health services provided by well-trained school and community mental health professionals. As an example of this need, recent Centers for Disease Control reports indicate that emergency room visits for mental health concerns during the pandemic increased among both 5- to 11-year-olds and 12- to 17-year-olds.

Behavioral and mental health interventions are critical to addressing the impact of traumatic experiences on child development and must be integrated into a comprehensive and cohesive system of care, delivered in schools, early childhood programs, transition programs, and community health and mental health systems. Investment in recruiting and retaining school mental health professionals and identifying and implementing evidence-based mental health interventions in all tiers is essential to achieving successful outcomes for all children and youth.

## School Mental Health Services

As we look toward the new school year, students and staff will continue to face the trauma of the pandemic and heightened concerns related to school safety. Schools and early intervention programs will need to hire additional mental health providers, collaborate with community mental health services, and train teachers, early interventionists, and administrators to identify children and youth who need short- and long-term services. Targeted federal investments are necessary to improving mental health in general, and good mental health is critical to academic achievement. as good mental health is critical to academic achievement.

## Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Professionals

Building a positive climate in schools and early childhood programs requires highly skilled school social workers, psychologists, and counselors. Collectively, these individuals make a difference in the lives of children and youth, resulting in positive developmental, academic, and social outcomes. Federal investments will help ensure sufficient numbers of mental health professionals specifically trained to meet the needs of all children and youth in schools and early intervention settings.

## Addressing Mental Health Needs of Children and Families

Positive school outcomes are a result of caring communities of adults, children, and youth learning together. This outcome also requires implementing multi-tiered systems of support, including evidence-based curriculum and intervention within a trauma-informed environment.

Access to mental health services—screening, providing direct services, engaging and supporting families, and connecting to community-based interventions—is also vital to the well-being of children and youth. Policies to fund mental health services through private health insurance, Medicaid, and programmatic mental health resources (e.g., evidence-based training, curriculum, and best practices) are needed to create a comprehensive system of supports to ensure children and families are mentally healthy.

School mental health and community providers should be trained in trauma-informed, culturally responsive interventions and should collaborate, as appropriate, to address the mental health needs of children and youth and their families. Such collaborations should include attention to the stigma of mental health challenges and ensuring an adequate number of professionals trained to address children’s complex social, emotional, and mental health needs.

## FAST FACTS ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

- ▶ One in six children have a mental health condition, but only half receive any mental health services.
- ▶ From 2019 to 2020, children with behavior or conduct problems increased by 21%.
- ▶ 4.4% of children aged 3-17 (approximately 2.7 million) have diagnosed depression.
- ▶ 9.4% of children aged 3-17 (approximately 5.8 million) have diagnosed anxiety.
- ▶ 8.9% of children aged 3-17 (approximately 5.5 million) have a diagnosed behavior problem.
- ▶ Suicide attempts among 10 to 12 year olds increased fivefold between 2010 and 2020