

Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools is Necessary.

Here is Why



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1. Student's mental health needs exist on a continuum

In the last decade, education organizations and researchers have recognized the value of a social-emotional approach to learning. These programs have been linked to increased academic achievement, improved attendance, and overall better school culture. For some students, SEL programs are an adequate tool to support mental health needs.

Many students require more support than readily available in the classroom, including coordinated efforts from the health services team and school counselors and psychologists. For these students, SEL serves as the first tier of a multi-tiered approach for mental health services. For students experiencing a higher need for mental health support, district stakeholders can offer support through school counselors, health services, and school psychologists.

The final tier of mental health services may require students to seek help from outside services, including telehealth services or local mental health providers that can care for mental wellness beyond what is available in schools.



2. There is a national shortage of school counselors

Many districts ask school counselors to juggle a host of responsibilities, including class schedules, assessments, onboarding, college applications, cumulative files, and more. In addition to these competing academic priorities, school counselors are also often the first stakeholder alerted for mental health support for students.

Although districts understand that counselors play a critical range of roles in schools, there are still too few. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students to every one counselor (250:1). However, as of AY 2019-2020, the national average is actually 424 students to every one counselor, and in some states, the ratio is nearly 850 students to one counselor. This shortage impacts counselors' availability to identify mental health concerns, provide ongoing support to students, and refer students for additional care outside of the school system.

Children and teens are in need of mental health support more than ever. The CDC reports that pediatric mental health-related emergency visits increased by 24% for young children and 31% for adolescents from April to October 2020. To combat the shortage of both counselors and licensed therapists, districts can implement programs that leverage community programs or telehealth services for increased support for all students.



3. Various barriers prevent students from accessing high-quality mental health care

Cost, availability, and transportation are among the top reasons students in need of health services are unable to gain access to timely care.

As young people respond to global circumstances, there is a new urgency to address mental health needs for all students. Due to prohibitive factors, 60% of youth with depression do not receive any mental health treatment, and of those who do receive some treatment, only 27% receive consistent care. Further, only 2% of children receiving public assistance and needing mental health care receive treatment. In 2021, the waitlists for children and teens to receive ongoing therapy averages 2-6 months and can be as long as a year in some states.

Mental health clinicians embedded in schools through school psychology or telehealth services can allow students in need to overcome many barriers that often prevent students from accessing the care they need in a timely manner.

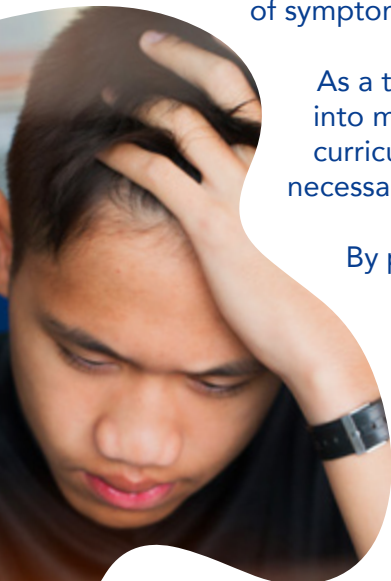


4. Mental health stigma exists, as trusted pillars in the community, schools can change that

Unfortunately, mental health stigmatization is not uncommon. The impact of negative attitudes toward mental health needs can lead to discrimination, misunderstanding of symptoms, or fear of seeking help.

As a trusted resource in the community, schools can educate families and students into mental health destigmatization. Teachers can offer age-appropriate mental health curriculum, school counselors and nurses can communicate accepting mental health as a necessary piece of care and advocate for the widespread need for these services.

By partnering with the community and other external providers, schools can offer increased education about mental health stigmatization and provide helpful tools and guidance to help staff, families, and students better understand mental health support.



About Hazel:

Hazel Health partners with schools to eliminate barriers to quality whole child care for all students. Hazel's culturally competent care team works alongside school nurses, counselors, and parents to treat students' physical and mental health concerns, connect families to local health resources, and advise on the next steps to ensure continuity of care. Schools using Hazel have seen a decrease in chronic absenteeism and improved learning and health outcomes.

Learn more, or set up time to discuss how Hazel can help your district provide whole child care to students in your schools. Visit hazel.co to learn more.

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