



Strengthening Mental Health Resources in School Systems

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The lack of adequate mental health resources has become increasingly prevalent, affecting the success in academics and the long-term satisfaction of students. Schools are often the place where students go for support, but underfunding, stigma, and overall lack of resources make it difficult for students to get help. This brief will cover the demand for mental health resources for students and explore how this affects them, while also proposing solutions on how schools can adapt to their needs.

II. OVERVIEW

The education system plays a role not only in supporting students, but also in impacting mental health with work and relationships with students. Schools tend to be the first place students experience a form of mental health issues because of how early on kids go to school, but there still isn't enough support for students. Limited and underfunded staff, stigma surrounding mental health, and more competition with school work cause a major gap between students and resources, and how the damage of mental health.

A. Relevance

Mental health issues in students have seen a significant spike in recent years. According to the CDC in a 2023 study, 4 in 10(40%) students had

persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, 2 in 10(20%) reported thoughts of suicide, and almost 1 in 10(10%) attempted suicide. According to the National Library of Medicine, suicide has been the second leading cause of death in the ages 10-19. Schools often lack adequate resources to support students who are experiencing these feelings. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1. The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics data in 2023-24 measures that there is a 376:1 ratio. Statistics prove that there is clearly not enough resources for students, and it is affecting the number of students struggling with their mental health.

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

Schools have also struggled in addressing the mental health issues students were experiencing. Mental health resources in schools weren't funded federally until the 1970s, which is shocking because mental health has also been an issue. Although the federal government attempted to support these mental health initiatives, a lot of the resources depended on local budgets. In recent years, 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General announced youth mental health as a national crisis, calling for immediate support. Since then, schools have started to be more accountable towards being lenient, giving days off, and focusing on

employing counselors, but it is still not enough.

IV. POLICY PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders are the kids. This is because they are the ones who are primarily affected by the lack of resources that schools provide. They receive the consequence of the schools not helping enough. Parents are also a form of stakeholders because their children are the ones being significantly impacted by resources. This leaves it up to the parents to focus on healing their children.

The school counselors, psychologists, and administrators are also stakeholders. The entire system is underfunded and ultimately receives the majority of the backlash because of the impact students feel. In many cases, the school staff wants to help the students but doesn't have enough training or staff to be able to help them.

School districts are major stakeholders as well because they decide where the funding goes. This means they choose what is being prioritized, contributing to the lack of funds for resources.

B. Risks of Indifference

The risk of indifference allows gaps for many long-term effects to occur. Ignoring the need for resources can cause students to have social and academic consequences. Academic performance can have a major decline in students experiencing mental health issues because of burnout and stress levels overall being too high, causing loss of motivation. With academic performance lowering, students can either drop out or choose not to go to college. Socially, students will tend to pull away from those around them and isolate

themselves.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

This issue is not a partisan issue, but an issue that relies on the realm of social and educational policy. Everyone is affected by this issue beyond a political party or affiliation. By strengthening resources in school districts, it benefits not only current students but also future generations of students who will enter the school system, making everyone more successful.

1. **Academic Achievement:** With this issue being addressed, it allows students to thrive in an environment where there is access to adequate resources to treat their mental health issues. Students will be able to focus on their work better and receive adequate support for the stress they experience.
2. **Community:** Access to more resources will strengthen the community as students will be able to access in-school support and communicate how they are feeling with school staff. This will allow better communication between parents, students, counselors, and teachers.
3. **Social:** More resources will break the stigma surrounding mental health issues and make students feel more comfortable. They will be inclined to converse more about feelings and understand they are not alone in experiencing these feelings.

V. TRIED POLICY

In 2019, California passed the Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA), also known as bill 75. It was a grant to increase the relationship between schools and mental health organizations. The policy had the correct idea, to provide resources for the different school districts and

foster a connection between agencies and schools.

The issue was that there was such a large discrepancy in resources among the districts. The wealthier districts had significantly better access to these mental health agencies, ultimately defeating the purpose of helping all students.

VI. POLICY OPTIONS

Increase funding for counseling staff

There is still a gap between what the ratio of students to counselors should be on average. To fix this, the state and federal government should prioritize funding schools with the ability to access and train more staff to fix this ratio and allow students to get enough help.

Mental health education

Schools should implement programs for students and faculty to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. This way, faculty can be more aware of the signs of students struggling, and students feel less isolated in their issues.

Partnership

Creating partnerships with mental health programs and schools enables an increase in the services provided. Instead of making it similar to the initial Mental Health Student Services Act, the government should focus on ensuring the even distribution of funds so that lower-income districts receive the same resources.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This paper addresses the increasing mental health crisis among students. The policies I introduced will allow equal access to mental health resources among schools. By focusing on partnerships and

funding initiatives, schools should be able to provide increased access to mental health resources.

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