



How can school and community partnerships support the mental health needs of students?

Mental health is fundamental to the overall health of school communities. It is also highly correlated to academic outcomes. Therefore, it is imperative that partnering schools and community organizations make intentional efforts to meet the needs of students who require significant mental health support.

The information in this document was developed to provide flexible, evidence-based guidance for districts to consider as they partner with community organizations to provide mental health supports to students.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the mental health of students. In a 2021 [Reuters survey of U.S. Schools](#), 74% of responding districts reported multiple indicators of increased student mental health stressors, while more than 50% reported the need for increased mental health referrals and counseling. Many of those seeking mental health services need crisis response services to address suicidal ideation or attempts, self-harm, intent to harm others or other mental health concerns that require targeted, intensive support.

[Partnering with external agencies, local nonprofits and organizations](#) that can offer mental health and behavioral crisis supports can increase the capacity of schools and districts to provide needed mental health supports for students.

Leveraging [social and emotional learning \(SEL\)](#), [positive behavior supports](#) and [restorative discipline practices](#) through a [trauma-informed lens](#) allows schools to effectively meet the needs of students with diverse mental health and well-being needs. This [roadmap](#) to effective SEL may also be helpful.

Mental health crisis teams can provide [targeted and intensive mental health supports](#) to students who require significant levels of support. These teams should include professionals, caregivers, [community partners](#) and stakeholders who understand robust approaches to mental health crisis management.

Supplemental federal funding (ESSER I, II and III) can be braided with existing federal and state funds to pay for essential services and materials to support mental health for students.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Ensure students already identified as having significant mental health needs receive immediate support and regularly update existing school and student support plans.
- Evaluate current internal capacity, systems, processes and policies that address mental health concerns.
- Create formal partnerships with external agencies, local nonprofits and organizations that can provide mental health and behavioral crisis supports to students and families.
- Create a school-based crisis management team to address mental health crisis supports and resources.
- Ensure students and staff have access to multiple reporting mechanisms to immediately access help in a crisis, including Call 211.

SEE ALSO

- [How can social and emotional learning and mental health supports be incorporated into summer learning?](#)
- [How can schools and communities partner to provide summer learning experiences?](#)
- [How can schools plan for effective summer learning experiences?](#)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

When planning for and providing mental health and crisis services, it is critical to account for students' cultural and religious differences. Additionally, all policies, resources and communication should be sensitive to language and developmental differences.

It is important to prioritize students who are historically underserved and have likely been disproportionately impacted by disruptions in learning. This includes students of color, students in poverty, students learning English and students with disabilities.

Leverage [transformative SEL practices](#) to examine root causes of inequities and further support students of diverse populations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Use mental health screening tools to determine the needs of students and consider hiring or contracting with [school-based mental health professionals](#) to meet increased demand.
- Create a school-based crisis management team comprised of professionals, caregivers, [community partners](#) and [stakeholders](#) who understand robust approaches to mental health crisis management.
- In partnerships with community organizations that provide wrap-around services for students, determine capacity to meet the mental health needs of students and analyze the policies and practices that contribute to or detract from a robust system of support.
- Provide school-based crisis management teams with [PREPaRE](#) training on effective approaches to school safety, crisis prevention, mitigation and preparedness. It would also be beneficial to consider offering school-based [telehealth services](#).
- Ensure school and community mental health partners create or update current practices and policies related to mental health crisis management, specifically [mandatory reporting](#) and [re-entry](#) after a suicide threat. [Behavioral](#) and [suicide](#) risk assessment tools are valuable during distance or in-person learning.
- Work with community partners to update and communicate reporting mechanisms that ensure students and families can quickly access help in a mental health crisis. Utilize more than one system and account for virtual access. Train staff and students on when and how to use these tools and follow up to ensure that users receive swift access to help. Oklahoma Resources include [Call 211](#), NAMI's Oklahoma hotline (800/522-9054) and crisis text line (text NAMI to 741-741), and the [National Suicide Prevention Hotline](#).