

Featured

**(1) Current Status of Funding for School Mental Health Services:
A Quick Overview**

**(2) Understanding youth perspectives is key to supporting healthy
and positive youth development**

(3) Social connections are essential for youth mental health

And, as always, you will find

(4) Links to more resources

**This community of practice *Practitioner* is designed
for a screen bigger than an iPhone.**

Current Status of Funding for School Mental Health Services: A Quick Overview

In the 21st century and especially post-COVID, federal and state governments have made historic investments in encouraging school mental health services. However, the end of relief funding and recent policy shifts are exacerbating long-standing challenges.

Federal funding changes: 54% of public schools cite inadequate funding as a major barrier to providing mental health services. The current situation:

- Many districts used pandemic relief funds to hire counselors and expand services. When this source of funding ended, a “funding cliff” emerged, causing cuts to mental health staff and programs.
- Schools will have less access to federal Medicaid reimbursement because the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” reduces federal Medicaid funding by 15%.
- Budget cuts and freezing of funds for school mental health by the Department of Education may be as high as a billion dollars.
- States across the U.S. have leveraged federal funding streams (e.g., BSCA grants, Medicaid demonstration programs, SAMHSA block grants, Department of Education mental health grants) to launch targeted mental health initiatives that involve schools. However, it is unclear at this time how policy changes will affect these funding sources.

Lack of qualified school personnel: Recent reports indicate that less than half of public schools are able to effectively provide mental health services to all students in need. In addition to inadequate funding, a major problem is insufficient qualified providers, especially when it comes to reducing persistent racial, ethnic, and gender disparities. This is a long-standing problem for all efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. Some states report severe shortages (e.g., Alabama, Mississippi, New Mexico, Arizona, West Virginia).

The federal School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program (\$180 million in funding for FY 2025) has been focused on increasing credentialed mental health providers in high-need districts. The purpose of this grant program is “to provide competitive grants to State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and consortia of LEAs to increase the number of credentialed mental health services providers providing school-based mental health services to students in LEAs with demonstrated need.” In a controversial move, the current

administration has refined its priorities designating a focus only on increasing the number of school psychologists.

Remote therapy is being explored to address provider shortages, especially in rural areas, and AI tools are being tested for early identification of at-risk students, though ethical concerns remain.

State-Level Actions: Since the pandemic, nearly one hundred laws in 38 states have been enacted to support school-based mental health. In 26 states, the legislation has allocated funding to expand services, including hiring providers and supporting telemental health.

A Few References

2025 Youth Mental Health Care Deserts: A National Look at Therapy Staffing Gaps in Schools

Report Reveals the Widening Gaps in Student Mental Health Support Across the U.S.

The Landscape of School-Based Mental Health Services

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). 'State Policies Supporting School Mental Health.'

For discussion and interchange:

>Understanding youth perspectives is key to supporting healthy and positive youth development

Thanks to advocacy for and by youth leaders, it is now commonplace at meetings across the country for several folks to stress “If we are going to plan for young people, we need their voices at this table.” Reasons for bringing young people to the table vary. Advocates range from those who appreciate the importance of understanding the perspective of youth, on through those who also are dedicated to promoting youth development and empowerment, and on to those who stress that youth participation benefits families, adults, organizations, planners, policy makers, communities, and society in general.

Here are excerpts from a recent article on the matter:

From: ***“Everybody’s Mind is Different. Like, It’s Not Gonna Work the Same”:
An Exploratory Study of Youth Perspectives on Mental Health***

“Understanding youth perspectives is key to supporting healthy and positive youth development. Youth perspectives enable interventions to be tailored to accommodate youth-specific needs and contexts, which improves engagement and can help increase youth social development.

Current mental health research is grounded in adult perspectives, resulting in research that may not be fully applicable to youth populations. The absence of youth perspectives is particularly notable in the evolving body of research defining mental health, which tends to assume that youth share the same perspectives on mental health as adults....

Although mental health historically has been conflated with mental illness, theoretical and empirical literature now defines mental health as beyond the absence of illness. For example, the World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community”.

Researchers have reflected this shift from an illness-focused perspective by introducing terms such as mental well-being, the positive state of mental health, and positive mental health. Models informed by these conceptualizations examine emotional, psychological, and social well-being...

Environmental contexts such as family, school, peer, and community are key influences shaping youth development and provide a framework through which youth conceptualize developmental outcomes, such as their mental health. Positive youth development theory, grounded in a developmental systems framework, emphasizes the complex and dynamic interplay of youth-environment transactions and its contribution to our understanding of adolescent development....

Researchers used focus groups to collect data exploring youth perspectives on mental health. Focus groups are common in research with youth due to their ability to give youth an opportunity to share experiences and perspectives, allow for reflection, and create a dialogue in which participants can socially construct knowledge about topics that are relevant to their lives....

Defining Mentally Healthy: Participants described mentally healthy as a dynamic state characterized by attributes such as grit, resilience, confidence, happiness, and energy... This positive outlook was often coupled with a focus on “finding balance” and “self-awareness.”...

In discussing how mentally healthy people navigate the world, participants emphasized the importance of self-awareness, including knowing limits and making good choices when faced with both typical life circumstances and adverse situations.... People who are mentally healthy were also described as having a healthier, resilient perspective, with an awareness that life involves both good and bad times....

Managing Mental Health: “It’s Healthy to be Sad Sometimes and Mad Sometimes.” Participants talked about how mentally healthy people exhibit a range of emotions,... Mentally healthy made coping with negative experiences, and sometimes negative mental health events, possible. Participants characterized getting mentally healthy as something that may be within one’s control. Within this concept, participants described how people have a personal responsibility to regularly assess and maintain their own mental health. If someone assesses their own mental health as poor, they further have the responsibility to address it through support from trusted sources (e.g., family, friends) and/or by seeking other types of treatment (e.g., counseling or medication) if needed. Still, others noted that these positive expressions demonstrated the ability to persevere beyond negative feelings, thus exhibiting resilience, a characteristic they identified earlier as being mentally healthy....

Integrating the Role of Social Environments: “How You’re Raised Determines. . .How You’re Gonna Deal With Knowing Yourself.” Participants agreed that the environment was key to their perspectives on mental health. One of the most prominent external voices was that of their families, who appeared to set the primary expectations around mental health... This speaks not only to the influence of family on perspectives on mental health, but also the ways in which these perspectives are passed down across generations....

In addition to family influences, youth characterized friends as central to thinking about mental health. For some, friends were described as a signal of positive mental health... Another echoed how these supportive relationships may motivate them to positive action and more beneficial outcomes... Being aware of and reflecting on the influence of friends was seen as an important contributor to mental health...

Youth also discussed the influence of their neighborhood and school on mental health... In terms of school, some participants believed that resource-poor schools would have fewer resources to foster good mental health, while others believed these schools could still provide valuable resources, such as good teachers. ...

Much of what the youth said about being mentally healthy, including feeling happy, optimistic, and being able to cope and find balance,... Most importantly these youth grasped the need to actively engage with their own mental health, keeping their minds in good shape and working through issues and challenges. Overall, participants agreed that being mentally healthy was important to positive development throughout the life course, promoting confidence, perseverance, personal responsibility, better inter- and intra-personal skills, and increased ability to manage stress and get help when needed. ...”

For more on including the perspectives of young people, see the following Center resources:

- > [*Youth Participation: Making It Real*](#)
- > [*About Student Voice and Participation*](#)
- > [*A Personal Look at Self-Reliance and Help Seeking \(a student’s perspective\)*](#)
- > [*Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Problems at School*](#)

For discussion and interchange:

>Social connections are essential for youth mental health

Schools experience many overlapping concerns related to youth subgroups and youth subculture. Schools can facilitate opportunities on campus for youth subgroups to engage positively in activity and connect with effective peer supports. As always, the more we understand about youth culture, the more effective our interventions can be.

Excerpted from: *Social connection as a key target for youth mental health*

“... A potentially untapped prevention and intervention approach to address mental health challenges among adolescents, through social connection, is the social network intervention approach. Social network interventions intentionally leverage or modify the features of social networks, to induce, enhance, or sustain psychological or behavioral changes (e.g., health behaviors like alcohol consumption, or mental health symptoms like mood), and achieve desired outcomes for individuals or groups.

Features of social networks that can be modified include social network size, closeness of ties between individuals, as well as targeting certain influential individuals within networks and changing the network structure itself. Given the importance of peer influence for adolescents' behaviors, there is potential to use social network interventions to reduce key risk factors and improve mental health among groups of adolescents.

For example...using the “key player” approach, which involves identifying the most socially referent (well-connected) individuals in a cohort. These socially referent young people were then tasked with developing and implementing their own anti-bullying interventions, tailored to the needs of their school. This resulted in a 25% reduction in victimization among the intervention schools, compared to the control schools over the following year.

Despite these promising findings, few studies have explored the efficacy of social network interventions for improving mental health outcomes specifically, among adolescents....

The application of social network interventions to youth mental health

To consider how this approach could be used to create positive changes to mental health among adolescents, it is important to consider the different kinds of social network interventions that exist. A seminal paper identified 4 types of social network interventions. These include:

- 1) the 'identifying individuals' method, where individuals are chosen for intervention based on specific network attributes (e.g., a measure of popularity, or 'centrality' – indicating a central position within the network);
- 2) 'segmentation', which involves targeting the intervention toward a specific group within the network (e.g., only those with poor mental health);
- 3) 'induction', which focuses on fostering new interactions among network members; and
- 4) 'alteration', which seeks to change the network structure itself ...

School connectedness and mental health

Much of young people's interaction with peers occurs in the school environment, where they spend a significant amount of their time. The extent to which a young person feels a connection to their school and with their peers at school, both contribute to school connection. In addition, interventions developed for the school environment should consider the broader context in which they are delivered and ideally be embedded within a whole school approach that aims to foster strong school connectedness.

School connectedness can be understood as the degree to which a student feels valued, supported and accepted in their school environment.... Whole school, multi-component programs which foster a positive school environment are likely to be key to reduce the risk of mental health problems for school students.... One area that might advance the initiatives designed to improve school connectedness is to invite the valuable suggestions and perspectives of young people themselves who are likely to have a range of excellent suggestions about what would make them feel more connected at school. This is underscored by the benefit afforded by acknowledging and respecting the expertise of adolescents in making decisions and shaping interventions designed for their peers...

Prevention strategies that leverage the importance of peers, social relationships and social networks can enhance support systems, reduce negative risk factors (such as bullying and substance

use) and may be used to diffuse positive mental health through the creation of supportive relationships, networks and environments. As preventive social network initiatives are further developed and tested, it will be critical to tailor approaches to the context in which they will be delivered, as well as take into account the unique needs and preferences of young people themselves.”

For more on social support and school connectedness, see our Center resources

>[*Peer Relationships, Peer Support*](#)

>[*Making Collaborative/Cooperative Learning Effective in Classrooms*](#)

>[*What is Youth Culture?*](#)

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

>>[**The Correlates and Consequences of Friendship Change and Friendlessness During Late Childhood and Early Adolescence**](#)

>>[**Neighborhood Disadvantage, Peer Acceptance, and Sense of Belonging among Middle School Students**](#)

>>[**It's who you know: A review of peer networks and academic achievement in schools**](#)

>>[**Student voice toolkit**](#)

>>[**Student voice to student outcomes study**](#)

>>[**Uncertain future of IDEA law puts students with disabilities at risk**](#)

>>[**Students at this Detroit school got free bikes ... they say it helped attendance.**](#)

>>[**New Gallup Poll: 1 in 4 Teachers Don't Have Necessary Resources, Support Staff**](#)

>>[**School Mental Health Experiences and Preferences Among Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial LGBTQ+ Youth**](#)

>>[**Student Parents Combine Studying, Working, and Public Programs to Support Their Families While in School**](#)

>>[**Disentangling the Effects of Social and Emotional Learning Programs on Student Academic Achievement Across Grades 1–12: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis**](#)

I don't understand why we have such a good relationship?



I think it's because I'm willing to listen to you gripe about school.



A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

- 10/22 Addressing challenging behaviors
- 10/22 Family engagement
- 10/23 Addressing bullying in the Individual Education Plan
- 10/23 How school leaders and teachers learn from each other
- 10/28 National Training, Education and Workforce Survey
- 10/28 Promoting self-confidence and self-esteem
- 10/29 Mental health and mental illness: what's the difference?
- 10/30 Cultivating the conditions for learning and well being
- 10/30 Understanding social anxiety
- 11/5 Evaluation of mental health in IEP
- 11/5 AI, inequity and imagination: student centered learning
- 11/12 Addressing suspensions and early dismissal for students with disabilities
- 11/13 Career exploration for young learners
- 11/13 School leaders supporting instruction
- 11/13 Support for homeless youth
- 11/13 Principals supporting teachers in classroom instruction
- 11/13 The power of protective factors in social development
- 12/2 Reducing risk for youth substance misuse /
- 12/10 Strategic planning for education leaders

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's series of videos explores guiding all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become engaged learners).

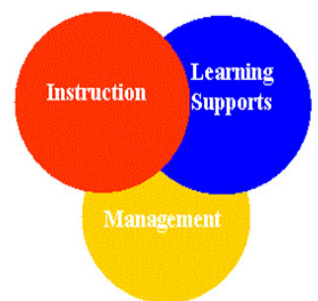
Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth (Webinar recording)

Just adding a few more services is not the answer.
Adopting MTSS is not sufficient.
Asking teachers to do more is just not realistic.

Teachers and students need a potent support system.

It's time to end the marginalization of student/learning supports!

It is time to start building a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.



Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

RELEASED for 2025-2026

An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month-by-Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources

Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. **Send all info to** ltaylor@ucla.edu

To Listserv Participants

- Please share this resource with others. (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- Let us know what's going on to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 140,000 on our listserv.)

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Looking for information? (We usually can help.)

Have a suggestion for improving our efforts? (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you! *Contact:* ltaylor@ucla.edu

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

Who Are We? Our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.