



Action Alert

School Mental Health NOW

School Mental Health provides a full continuum of behavioral health supports for students and their families.
It is more important now than ever.

What are Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems?

Schools are a natural setting for collaboration across partners to promote student well-being and to support early identification and intervention for students with mental health concerns. Comprehensive school mental health systems:

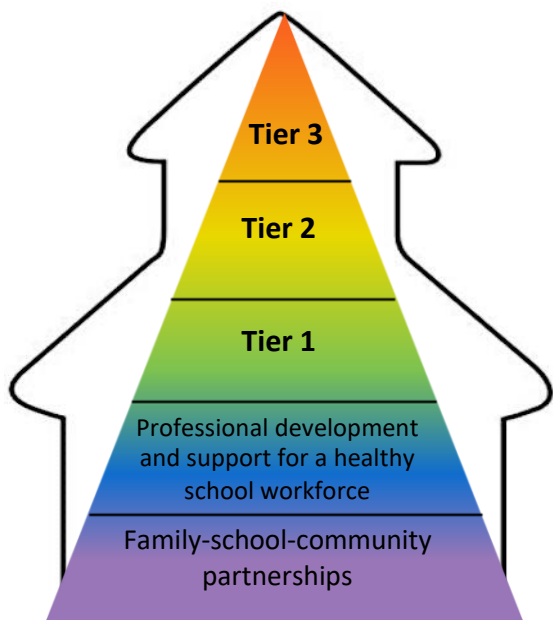
- ⇒ provide a **full array of supports and services** that promote positive school climate, social emotional learning, and mental health and well-being, while reducing the prevalence and severity of mental illness.
- ⇒ are built on a **strong foundation of district and school professionals**, including administrators and educators, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, school nurses, other school health professionals) in **strategic partnerships with students, families, and community health and mental health partners**.
- ⇒ assess and address the **social, political, and environmental structures**—public policies and social norms— that influence mental health outcomes.

Key Components of Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems

Individualized intervention for students displaying mental health concerns that cause significant impairment in functioning

Early intervention for students at risk for or with mental health concerns that cause mild to moderate impairment in functioning

Promotion of positive social, emotional, and behavioral skills and overall well-being for students and staff



Why is School Mental Health Important?

Promotes **well-being** for all students and school staff, including teachers



Supports **positive academic outcomes**, including better grades and increased attendance



Mitigates the negative outcomes of **Adverse Childhood Experiences**



Results in greater mental health **treatment completion**

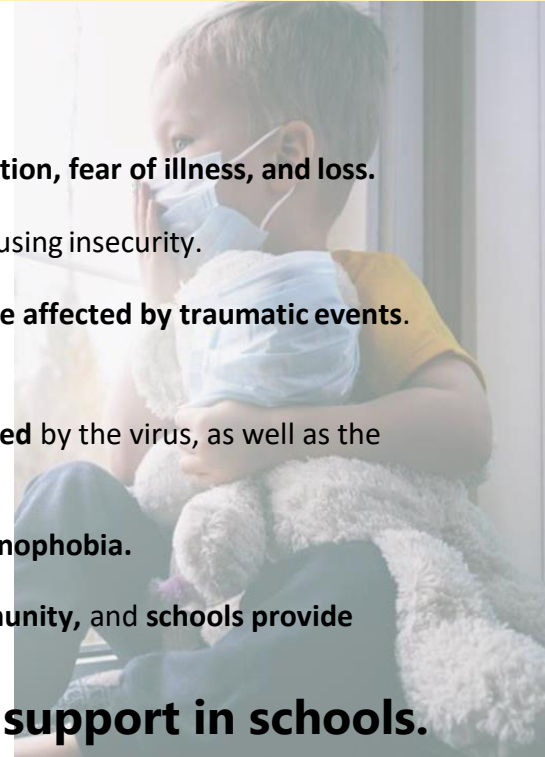
Why Now?

Youth mental health is suffering due to COVID-19

- Youth mental health is negatively affected by **learning disruption, social isolation, fear of illness, and loss.**
- Many students are facing **family challenges** such as job loss, and food and housing insecurity.
- Although youth are not at higher risk of COVID-19 than adults, **youth are more affected by traumatic events.**

Youth of color are disproportionately affected by COVID-19

- Black, Latinx, and Native American populations are **disproportionately affected** by the virus, as well as the associated economic challenges.
- Asian American communities have been exposed to **increased racism and xenophobia.**
- Youth of color are **less likely to access mental health treatment in the community, and schools provide increased access** to our most vulnerable youth.



Youth are most likely to receive mental health support in schools.

What Can You Do About It?

Schools are a vital partner in developing students' social-emotional health and addressing stress and adversity. To meet challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, **education and behavioral health leaders must promote and expand school mental health services and supports.**

- Increase **mental health staffing** by moving toward national standards for ratios of student instructional support personnel and establishing partnerships with community behavioral health providers to provide school-based mental health services and referral pathways to care in the community
- Provide **professional development** on adversity, trauma, toxic stress, and cultural responsiveness
- Implement strategies and supports to **promote staff well-being** to address secondary traumatic stress
- Expand **mental health awareness programs**, including mental health literacy for staff and students, to prevent stigma
- Implement **universal social emotional learning** programs across all grades
- Institute **universal screening and monitoring** for mental health concerns, including assessments of **social determinants of mental health**
- Incorporate **evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention activities**, including for students experiencing traumatic stress



The National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Maternal and Child Health Bureau to advance school mental health programs and policies to promote success for America's youth. [SchoolMentalHealth.org](https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org)

