SUPPORTING CHILD WELL-BEING THROUGH STRENGTHENING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

WHY THIS MATTERS

Fostering positive mental health in students can improve their overall health and improves student learning, attendance, and engagement. Positive mental health also reduces bullying, risky behaviors, substance abuse, school violence, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Since students spend the majority of their days at school, strengthening student mental health in school benefits the whole school community.

SCHOOLS ARE CONNECTED TO
95%
OF ALL 5-17 YEAR OLD KIDS

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

School connectedness – the feeling of belonging in a school that cares about each student – positively impacts student mental health. Kids who feel connected to at least one person at school have significantly better mental health than those who lack a connection to school.[1] Just one accepting adult in the life of an LGBTQ youth can reduce their risk of suicide attempt by 40%.[2]

Schools that cultivate positive relationships and implement a preventative framework addressing the needs of all students—including the screening of all students on mental health measures—have demonstrated positive results and improved symptoms of student depression.[3]

Outside of school, research shows that getting at least 8 hours of sleep improves mental health and academic performance. The number of high schoolers who sleep that minimum amount has steadily declined since 2007 (when smartphones were launched).[4] Scientists stress that teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep each night, but their biological sleep rhythms naturally cause teens to fall asleep later. To account for this, researchers recommend instruction should not begin before 8:30 a.m.[5] School start times impact mental health and cognitive functioning: those who begin school at 8:30 or later have better performance, better attendance, and fewer car crashes.[6]

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?

Many kids do not receive any mental health treatment. The ratio of mental health professionals to students in Wisconsin and across the nation is far below recommended standards. The number of students per school counselor and per school psychologist are about twice the recommended levels, and 7x the recommended number of students to school social workers.[7]

To address the mental health needs of students, Wisconsin is investing in comprehensive school mental health systems (CSMHS).[8] Schools implementing a CSMHS offer a continuum of services to all students.

Additionally, there are a growing number of peer-led youth groups in Wisconsin. These are vital to providing youth voice and serve an important role given the shortage of mental health professionals in schools. To see the variety and geographic spread of peer-led groups, click on this **map.**

Integrated into academic and behavior systems

Continuum of mental health supports

Collaboration

Needs assessment and resource mapping

Mental health referral pathways

Sustainability

Data

Infused with the guiding principles of trauma sensitive schools

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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WHAT HELPS?

School connectedness and strong relationships with staff and peers.

Positive, not punitive, school culture that supports belonging.

Sufficient sleep and developmentally appropriate start times.

WHAT WE CAN DO

↻ STUDENTS

- Build positive relationships among your friends and peers. Healthy relationships protect you from mental health concerns and build resilience to overcome life's challenges.

- Advocate for student mental health in your school or on your campus. For examples, see the **Youth Mental Health Groups.**

- Submit a confidential tip to **Speak Up Speak Out Wisconsin** if you know of someone who poses a threat to themselves or to your school.

↻ PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

- Encourage your student to participate in a sport, club, or school activity – this can foster connections to their school.

- Ensure your child gets sufficient sleep every night.

- Explore parent **resources** to understand the developing brain and impact on mental health, behavior, and learning.

↻ SCHOOLS

- Build a positive, welcoming, and inclusive school culture.

- Prioritize school belonging so every student feels connected to at least one supportive adult.

- Focus on bullying prevention as a central feature of the school's safety plan.

- Implement universal mental health screening of all students.

- Provide instruction and training to students and staff on suicide prevention, positive mental health practices, and wellness.

- Create a supportive culture for educators' mental health.

- Adopt trauma-informed learning and supports over disciplinary approaches.

- Start school after 8:30 a.m. for middle school and high school students.

↻ POLICYMAKERS

- Support increased, stable funding of comprehensive school-based mental health services where most kids spend their day.

- Prioritize and fund the recruitment and retention of school mental health professionals.[9]

- Increase funding for peer support services.

- Provide access and coverage for students to receive mental health telehealth services regardless of insurance coverage.

- Require schools to teach mental health literacy and suicide prevention education. Require school staff to take suicide prevention and mental health training.

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Wisconsin Office of **Children's Mental Health**