



Student Mental Health, In Brief

August 2022

What's happening, in brief?

Measures of youth mental wellness have been on the decline for years, long before the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated mental health challenges – in Wisconsin and across the nation. However, it also ushered in broader use of telehealth mental health services and widespread awareness of the importance of mental health. Also, in response to the youth mental health crisis, unprecedented state and federal dollars have been allocated to address mental health and wellness in schools.

What's happening at the state-level?

Efforts to improve children's mental health are underway throughout the state, including multiple state agencies, county health departments, and numerous nonprofit organizations. Some of the major initiatives include:

- **\$5 million to build a statewide Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation** program to assist early childhood care providers in addressing challenging behaviors and reduce program expulsions. (More information from the [Alliance](#) and [Department of Children & Families \(DCF\)](#)).
- **\$30 million for the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five Grant**. Over the course of three years these funds will be spent on strengthening family and provider input; improving equity; funding new pathways and increasing pay as well as training for the early childhood education workforce. (More information from [DCF](#).)
- **\$20 million from Governor Evers' Get Kids Ahead initiative**, which allocates \$15 million to support K-12 school based mental health services, and \$5 million for the UW System to help university students access student mental health services. (More information from the [Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\)](#).)
- **\$3 million in federal funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to address school mental health**. Total pandemic relief funds allocated for Wisconsin schools is \$2.4 billion, much of which has yet to be spent. These funds are managed by DPI. (More information on [CARES](#) and [ARPA](#) funds.)
- **\$14 million to build behavioral health career pathways and to support the Craig Yabuki Mental Health Walk-in Clinic** using ARPA funds. These funds are part of a series of investments to transform Wisconsin's behavioral health system and directly support youth mental health services. (More information [here](#).)

What's happening at the local-level?

Local school districts have been working hard to address both student and staff mental wellness, though they face a shortage of school mental health professionals. The majority of schools assess students on mental health measures while at school, and many offer treatment services (in person or telehealth) to eligible students in school.



Schools are also using the Mental Health Literacy Units of Instruction, which were co-developed by the Office of Children's Mental Health and the Department of Public Instruction. There were over 1,000 downloads of this key resources during the 2021-22 school year. Partner organizations are training educators to use these units of instruction.

- [Mental Health Literacy Units of Instruction](#)

Students are taking leadership roles to help improve student mental health in a variety of peer-led groups across the state. There were over 80 student groups trained in Sources of Strength during the 2021-22 school year.

- [Mental Health Peer Groups in Wisconsin](#)

What recommendations and best practices are driving our work to improve children's mental health?

- [Hopeful Futures Campaign](#) and [Hopeful Futures School Mental Health Report Card](#)
- [Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Wisconsin](#)
- La Follette School of Public Affairs Report: [Wisconsin School Mental Health Services: Comparative Analysis and Successful Practices](#)
- OCMH Fact Sheet: [Strengthening Student Mental Health](#)
- [Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework: Building and Sustaining a Comprehensive System](#)

What resources are available to schools?

Schools can access a variety of comprehensive resources from DPI:

- [School Mental Health](#)
- [Resiliency](#)
- [Screening Tools](#)
- [Trauma Sensitive Schools](#)

Schools can connect with their regional CESA and partner organizations to provide guidance and training:

- [Coalition for Expanding School-Based Mental Health](#)
- [Wisconsin Safe & Health Schools Center](#)

Additionally, schools can contact the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH@wi.gov).