

# OMHNSS Information Brief

## Why We Need School Mental Health Programs and Services

Angela Volz, Holli Sink, Karin Vanderzee, Raven Cuellar, and Jen Elfstrom, Miami University Graduate Research Assistants (This brief also is available with reference citations on the OMHNSS website)

Student Mental Health is a Major Concern, Affecting Both the Health System and the Education System.

- › Mental illness is a serious, yet under-recognized public health problem that poses serious consequences to students' overall well-being and academic success.
- › Mental illness ranks first among illnesses that cause disability in North America and in Western Europe.
- › Between 20 and 38% of youth in the United States require mental health services, yet over 75% of them do not receive treatment.
- › Emotional and behavioral health problems represent significant barriers to academic success.
- › Children and adolescents with emotional disturbance (5-9% of school-age youth) have the highest failure rates, with 50% of these students dropping out of high school.

In order to address mental health problems early, we must reach children where they spend the majority of their time—in schools.

- › Schools offer unparalleled access to students in order to address both academic and mental health needs, which are intricately related.
- › In the U.S. over 52 million youth attend 114,000 schools.
- › School mental health is becoming part of the national agenda. For example, President Bush's New Freedom Commission (2003) recommended that school mental health programs be improved and expanded.

Expanded school mental health represents a solution that will satisfy both the Health System's and the Educational System's needs regarding student mental health.

- › Expanded school mental health encompasses:
  - › School-family-community partnerships.
  - › Mental health education, promotion, and assessment.
  - › Prevention, early intervention, and treatment services.
  - › Mental health services for all students, including students in both general and special education.
- › Expanded school mental health has the capacity to:
  - › Improve access to mental health services.
  - › Reduce the stigma of receiving mental health care.
  - › Maintain treatment gains.
  - › Enhance prevention efforts.
  - › Prevent school drop-out.
  - › Improve emotional and behavioral functioning of students.
  - › Address the mandates of the 2002 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education and Intervention Act (IDEIA).

Students' unmet mental health needs have serious financial implications. In the United States alone, the annual economic, indirect cost of mental illness is approximately \$79 billion, the majority of which reflects loss of productivity.

These costs could be drastically reduced if mental health problems are identified and treated early.

Successful school mental health programs must attend to principles of quality and best practice.

- › Potential for sustainability, commitment of necessary resources, and well-trained staff are essential for the success of school mental health programs.
- › School mental health programs' characteristics must match the target population and be socioculturally relevant.
- › Systematic assessment and evaluation of outcomes help to ensure the effectiveness of school mental health programs.