

Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis

2023 Legislative Priority

WSPTA recognizes that we are facing a national emergency in mental health for children and youth.

Background

The National Institute of Mental Health found that nearly half of all adolescents have experienced some sort of mental health disorder, and one in five of these is serious.⁽¹⁾ This is particularly devastating in Washington State⁽²⁾, where in 2018 a full 20% of high schoolers reported that they have a suicide plan, and half of them attempted suicide in just that one year.⁽³⁾ Since then, the pandemic has created an additional mental burden that will have impacts for years to come.⁽⁴⁾



800K high school students in WA state



42M adolescents in the US



20% reported that they **have a suicide plan**



49.5% experienced some sort of **mental health disorder**



10% reported that they **attempted suicide**



10.9% experienced a **serious mental health disorder**

*2018 Healthy Youth Survey

*National Institute of Mental Health

Every stage of the student experience presents unique mental health challenges, but Washington State funding for Mental Health Professionals is extraordinarily low. When a school is without a nurse, counselor, social worker, or psychologist, the need for health services does not go away. So other sources of local funding are pursued, creating a severe equity issue, affording basic health needs disproportionately to those communities which can generate the necessary revenue. Other communities are forced to leverage Educators and Administrators, who are not adequately trained to deliver health services.

In the 2022 Legislative Session, House Bill 1664 was signed into law, rolling out increased state funding through the Prototypical School Model over the next three years to improve Health Professional to Student Ratios. This is a life-saving opportunity, but there are not enough people applying for the relevant training and graduate level programs.⁽⁵⁾ The legislature can help solve this with increased investments in recruiting and financial aid. These programs also need to increase capacity so that they can accept more applicants⁽⁶⁾, and the legislature should invest in incentives for current health professionals to offer part-time training or move onto becoming school district employees or contractors. New graduates can choose from several opportunities, and the legislature can provide incentives for them to work in public schools.



"The state continues to face a shortage of much-needed healthcare professionals, while demand for behavioral health workers continues to grow."

— Washington Health Workforce Council



"We are experiencing a dire nursing faculty shortage, which means qualified students are being turned away from programs."

— Washington State Nurses Association

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For More Information

Lizzy Sebring, WSPTA Advocacy Director
ptaadvocacydir@wastatepta.org

Marie Sullivan, WSPTA Legislative Consultant
legconsultant@wastatepta.org

For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our website.

We all need to confront this crisis. Educators, administrators, and families all play critical roles in supporting the mental health of students. Let's work with legislators to provide ample funding to make training and other resources available to all who care for children.

Student mental health is a genuine emergency and confronting it must be a definitive priority for our state. Let's use our collective PTA voice to advocate for legislation which effectively addresses the Student Mental Health Crisis.

Proposed Solutions



Washington State PTA shall support legislation or policies that ensure all students have access to the behavioral and mental health resources they need to thrive, including funding for:

- Reduced ratios of students to mental health professionals.
- Programs and incentives to recruit, train, and retain mental health professionals.
- Resources to assist families.
- Training and support for educators and administrators.

Citations

- (1) https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml#part_155771
- (2) <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/821-135-YouthBehavioralHealthSitRep-March2022.pdf>
- (3) <https://www.askhys.net/FactSheets>
- (4) <https://smartcenter.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Case-for-School-Mental-Health-FINAL-12.4.20.pdf>
- (5) <https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-Health-Workforce-Council-Report-Final.pdf>
- (6) <https://www.wsna.org/news/2019/new-nursing-workforce-data>