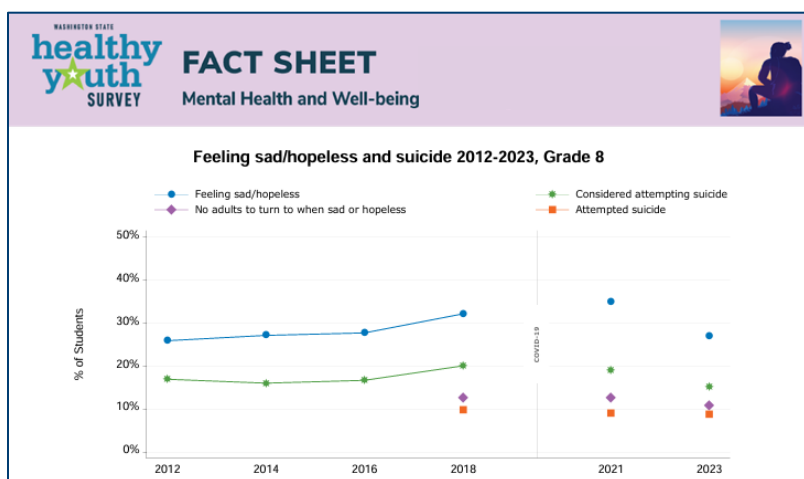


Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis 2025-26 Legislative Priority

WSPTA recognizes that we have a national emergency in mental health for children and youth. We must act!

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. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health found that rates of preteen suicide have been increasing approximately 8% annually since 2008.¹ This is particularly devastating in Washington State, where in 2023 15% of 8th graders considered committing suicide and 13% made a plan to commit suicide, with 9% attempting suicide in that one year alone.² Unfortunately, Washington tops the chart for youth depression, ranking 48th in the country with 23% of youth having a major depressive episode in the last year (compared to 20% national average), and Washington ranks 49th for youth suicidality, with 15% of our youth having serious thoughts of suicide, compared to 13% nationwide.³



Having mental health professionals and resources in our schools is an effective way to address the mental health crisis and improve academic progress for our young people.⁴ 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 on to 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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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 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 and preventative measures 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

For More Information

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For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our [website](#).

Citations

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