



School-Based Mental Health at the Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health

Nearly one in five youth has a diagnosable mental health disorder,¹ with half of these children not receiving needed mental health services.² If unaddressed, these problems can impair individual academic performance and negatively impact the broader learning environment.

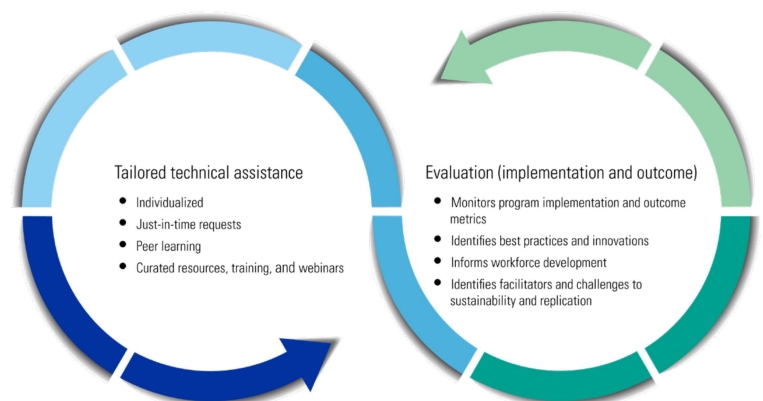
Schools are a natural environment for identification and intervention, and school-based mental health programs can increase access to needed mental health services. School-based mental health programs can provide a continuum of mental health services for students, families, and the school community, with evidence of improved individual outcomes and school climate.

The Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health, within the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University, focuses on research, policy, and practice. The Center of Excellence has expertise in the design, implementation, and evaluation of school-based mental health programs.

Services	Topics	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and evaluation • Technical assistance • Policy and economic analysis • Strategic planning • Meeting design and facilitation • Awards and grants management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing key processes and outcomes • Funding and sustainability • Community partnership development • Needs assessment and resource mapping • Program implementation best practices for reimbursement • Provider retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and school districts • Behavioral health providers • Youth and families • Policymakers • Government agencies • Funders and payers

Bidirectional Learning: Technical Assistance and Evaluation

The Center of Excellence’s integrative approach to technical assistance and evaluation applies a bidirectional learning cycle to inform and, ultimately, improve children’s behavioral health. A key component to this partnership-based approach is that clients are able to quickly apply findings to their own practices.



¹ Cree RA, Bitsko RH, Robinson LR, et al. Health care, family, and community factors associated with mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders and poverty among children aged 2–8 years — United States, 2016. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*, 2018;67:1377–1383.

² Whitney, D.G. & Peterson, M.D. (2019). U.S. national and state-level prevalence of mental health disorders and disparities of mental health care use in children. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173(4): 389-91.

What We Know That Works

The Center of Excellence's research and real-world experience contribute to a growing evidence base around best practices for implementing and sustaining school-based mental health programs.

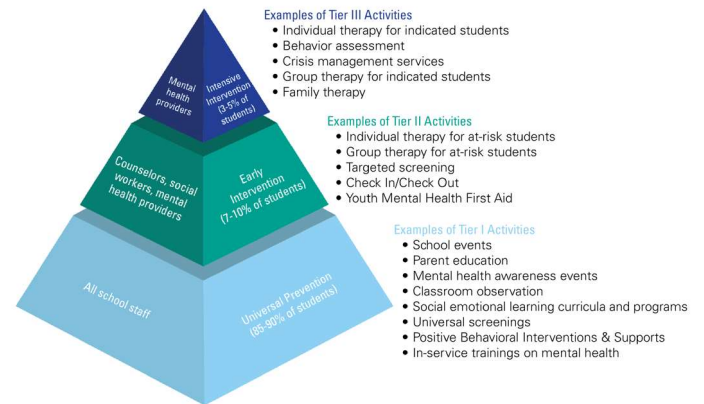
Multitiered Intervention Strategies

School-based mental health programs can be developed using a three-tiered intervention framework, where provision of mental health services falls into three distinct levels: schoolwide, targeted to at-risk students, and tailored to students in need of intensive services.

Insights From the Field

- Customize school-based mental health programs to fit the school's culture. School-based mental health is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Providers must identify needs of the individual school to determine how the program can effectively serve its students.
- Cultural humility can promote safety, empowerment, and healing for a student. Culturally competent providers are able to better serve students holistically and incorporate the important elements of mental health stigma reduction, social emotional learning curricula, and trauma-informed care.

Examples of Apex Services by Tier



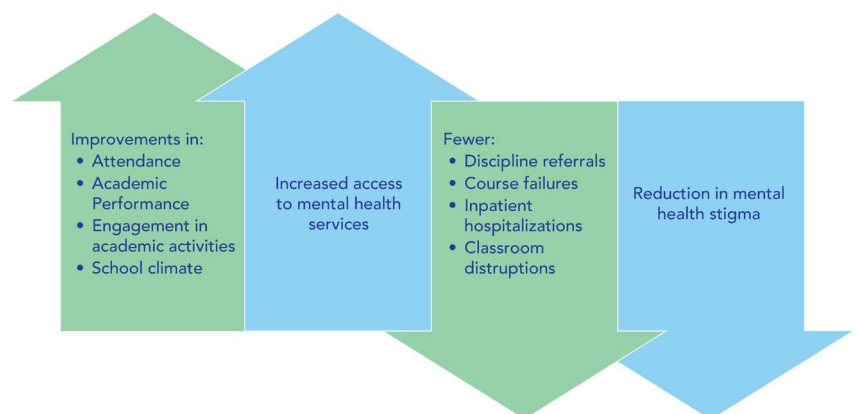
Adapted from Bieber, B., Hotchkiss, H., & Palmer, B. (2007). *A Guide to School Mental Health Services*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.

Sustainability of School-Based Mental Health Programs

- Establish diverse funding streams. Successful programs rely on a diverse range of funding sources to increase available resources, integrate additional partners into the program, and provide protection if a single funding source ends. In addition to billing third-party payers (e.g., Medicaid), local, district, or state grants can cover nonbillable services.
- Build positive relationships with school administration and staff. Successful school-based mental health program implementation relies on strong school partnerships and parent engagement. A key component of this involves developing clearly explained goals, roles and expectations, and processes for the program.

Impact

Ongoing monitoring increases program effectiveness. Data from school-based mental health programs across the nation shows positive outcomes for students, families, and schools. Helpful data to monitor include services provided, educational impact, mental health and psychosocial outcomes, and qualitative experiential feedback.



Additional Resources

Georgia Apex Program: Assessing Readiness & Implementation Best Practices. [View](#).

Georgia Apex Program: Year 5 Evaluation. [View](#).

Finding Innovation and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Supporting Mental Health in Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic. [View](#).

DiGirolamo, A., Desai, D., Farmer, D., McLaren, S., Whitmore, A., McKay, D., et al. (2021) Results from a statewide school-based mental health program: Effects on school climate. *School Psychology Review*, (50), 1. 81-98. [View](#).