

## Why is Supporting Mental Wellness at School Important?

When students come to school, they bring their **whole selves** into the classroom. If students' basic needs are not met or they are dealing with trauma or mental health issues, their ability to learn is significantly impacted.

Amidst the ongoing pandemic, nationwide, about **7 in 10** public schools have seen a rise in the number of children seeking mental health services. Yet, **only half of all those schools** were able to effectively provide services to their students.

## What Mental Health Supports are Needed at School?



**Social emotional learning (SEL):** Building students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, establish and maintain empathetic, supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.



**Trauma-informed training:** The goal is for adults in schools to understand how trauma can impact brain development and behavior, so they can effectively provide strategies and structures to support individual students and the school community.



**Restorative justice:** Restorative practices seek to build community and address the root causes of student behavior issues by giving students and staff the tools and strategies to repair and improve relationships and communication.



**Targeted interventions:** With the support of mental health professionals, school staff can support students with targeted interventions like small group sessions, personalized goals and accountability systems, and more. These options help students who may be struggling and prevent further escalation.



**Mental health professionals:** For students with more intensive needs, trained and licensed clinicians are needed to provide supports beyond what educators can provide, like crisis response, cognitive behavioral therapy, grief counseling, and more.

When **SEL, trauma-informed training, and supports from mental health professionals** are implemented with fidelity and across the whole school, these supports can lead to increased academic outcomes, improved school culture, and reduction in school dropouts. This **holistic approach** is critical to helping support our students in every DC public school.





## Who Can Provide Mental Health Supports at School?



**School-level supports:** schools might use their own funding for social emotional learning, professional development for staff, or to hire mental health professionals. Unfortunately, not all schools have the resources to do this, so supports vary by school.



**Department of Behavioral Health (DBH)** places clinicians in schools and oversees DC's school-based behavioral expansion program alongside community-based organizations (CBOs).



**Community-Based Providers:** schools can partner with CBOs to hire clinicians or bring in additional support to individual schools.



**OSSE, DCPS, and Public Charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs)** provide some schools with SEL programs, trauma-informed training, and mental health staff through partnerships at the state and central office level.

## What is Needed to Improve School-Based Mental Health Support in DC?

Parents have advocated for a comprehensive vision for school-based mental health, including:

- Develop and sustain a **pipeline of diverse mental health professionals**
- Improve **communication about what supports are available** at the school and in the community
- **Assess the mental health needs of the community** to show where support is available/where there are gaps in order to inform plans for expanding support
- Improve **coordination of care** across systems and agencies within schools
- Develop a strong **accountability system** across DC agencies

## How Can Parents Get Involved?

- Testify at a public hearing to call for increased mental health supports in all schools.
- Attend a Coordinating Council on School Behavioral Health Meeting with the Department of Behavioral Health.
- Want to learn more? Contact [info@dcpave.org](mailto:info@dcpave.org)