

Improving Access to School Based Mental Health Counseling for Middle and High School Students in the United States

Proposal Introduction/Brief Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “In 2023, 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and many students experienced symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other emotional distress” (CDC, 2024). Schools are usually the first place where students look for help but many districts are facing counselor shortages and limited mental health resources. When students cannot access support their academic performance, attendance, and overall well being is suffering.

The proposal needs funding to expand the access to school based counseling for middle and high school students by increasing the number of licensed professionals and structured support services during the whole school year.

Need/Problem Statement

Youth mental health has become a big national concern, it's being talked about more and more everyday. Studies show that a big number of adolescents report constant feelings of sadness or hopelessness and many of them don't receive the mental health support they need. Schools are expected to provide behavioral and emotional support but many operate with a bad counselor to student ratio. Middle and high school students are very vulnerable due to academic pressure, family stress, social obstacles, and the influence of social media. Without having accessible counseling students could experience:

- Declining academic performance
- Behavioral issues
- Higher risk of long term mental health struggles

The big issue is not a lack of need, it's a lack of access. Many students usually deal with long wait times to see school counselors or go to schools that have little to no mental health services. Expanding school based counseling will directly address this gap and give students consistent intervention support.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

To improve access to mental health counseling services for middle and high school students within one academic year.

Objectives

- Increase student access to counseling services by 25% during the academic school year.
- Reduce the reported symptoms of anxiety and stress among participants students by 20%.
- Provide at least 500 students with counseling sessions within one year.
- Reduce referrals about emotional or behavioral distress by 15% by the end of the school year

These objectives are realistic, measurable, and connected directly to the need.

Program Project Description/Timeline Table

Program Overview

The proposed program will expand school based mental health services by:

- Two licensed mental health counselors
- Implementing a structured referral system
- Having mental health awareness workshops for students
- Offering individual and small group counseling

The program is going to prioritize middle and high school students identifying them through self referrals, teacher referrals, and administrative recommendations.

Timeline

Recruit and hire counselors

Start Date: May 2026

Completion Date: July 2026

Develop referral systems

Start Date: June 2026

Completion Date: July 2026

Begin counseling students

Start Date: August 2026

Completion Date: May 2027

Mid year review

Start Date: January 2027

Completion Date: January 2027

Final evaluation report

Start Date: June 2027

Completion Date: July 2027

Evaluation Plan

Program success will be measured using both outcome data and participation data.

Outcome Measurement

- Pre and post program student mental health surveys
- Discipline referral tracking
- Attendance rate comparisons
- Counselor progress

Participation Measurement

- Number of students served
- Workshop attendance records
- Number of counseling sessions conducted

Data will be reviewed in the middle of the year and at the end of the year to assess the effectiveness and areas for improvement. The evaluation will show whether the objectives were met and how to move forward with future adjustments.

Budget

Salaries for 2 Licensed Counselors

Amount: \$120,000

Training and Professional Development

Amount: \$5,000

Counseling Resources and Materials

Amount: \$3,000

Administrative Costs

Amount: \$5,000

Program Evaluation Tools

Amount: 2,000

Total Requested Amount: \$135,000

All of the requested funds will support the implementation and evaluation of the program. The majority of the budget is going to go towards a qualified staff because that is important for increasing access and ensuring high quality mental health services.

Reference Page

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Adolescent mental health — facts and statistics*.
https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/mental-health/index.html?utm_source