



State of Student Mental Health

Millions of students across the nation go to school every day with unmet mental or behavioral health needs, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression, that threaten their well-being and educational attainment. In a given year, as many as 20% of school-age children meet the diagnostic criteria for a mental health disorder, but only 12% receive services to address these issues.¹ Suicide rates among children 10 years and older have also climbed significantly since 2007, making suicide the second leading cause of death among adolescents before the pandemic.²

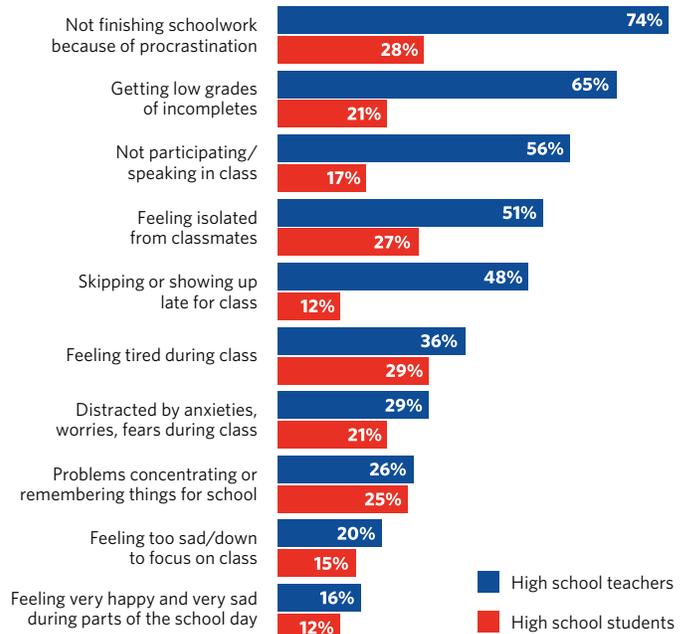
These concerns are further amplified among students from underserved communities, including communities of color. Students from underrepresented communities are at higher risk of depression and substance misuse, while also having less access to mental and behavioral health services.³ When students have untreated mental health issues, it is harder for them to learn.⁴ This correlates with chronic absenteeism, school failure, and school dropout, leading to possible underemployment, financial instability, or involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system.⁵

Even before the pandemic, evidence showed that many schools were struggling to keep pace with the demand for mental health services. COVID-19 amplified the need for mental and behavioral health services among school-aged youth, which if left unaddressed will only exacerbate these trends:

- APA’s Stress in America survey finds that high numbers of teenagers are facing continued uncertainty and experiencing high levels of stress and signs of depression.⁶
- National screenings show that children, adolescents and teens have struggled emotionally during the pandemic more than any other age group, with one-third of teen girls and one-fifth of teen boys experiencing a new or worsening anxiety.⁷
- CDC data show that from April through October 2020, the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 11 visiting an emergency room due to a mental health crisis increased by 24 percent as compared to the previous year. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, that increase was 31 percent.
- Nearly 40,000 children have lost a parent during COVID-19, making them at greater risk of traumatic grief, depression, poor educational outcomes, and unintentional death or suicide.⁸

A recent EdWeek Research Center survey found that a majority of students reported experiencing more problems now than they did before COVID-19 began, and more students are seeking mental health services through their schools.⁹ Twenty-one percent of high schoolers indicated that the past year was the first time they considered using school-based mental health services. Students also reported that since the pandemic, they are more distracted, have trouble concentrating or remembering things, are more tired in class, feel isolated from classmates, are getting lower grades, and are procrastinating more frequently on schoolwork.

Additionally, the findings continue to highlight the disparities amongst different populations of students. 77% of Black and Latino students reported more struggles with their mental or behavioral health, approximately 9 points higher than their white or Asian counterparts. Low-income students were also substantially more likely to report experiencing



such concerns. Additional data show the greater risk of violence, harassment, and discrimination Asian-American students face, and how LGBTQ+ students have experienced increased anxiety and stress, while being isolated from their peers and potentially losing school-based support groups.¹⁰

References

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