

Bill Messer
Scarborough HS
LD 829

Good afternoon,

Over the last 30 plus years, I have worked and/or have been involved with mental health, Day Treatment education and public school education. During this time, I've had the fortune opportunity to see how mental health and education interweave with each system(s) given the current infrastructure at a local and state level. There has been a significant spike since COVID (even prior to COVID) with students possessing moderate to severe mental health concerns (Depression, Anxiety, suicide ideations or attempts, family conflicts, substance use and abuse) which has dramatically interfered with students to be fully available to learn and be present in their classrooms. Often times, families aren't aware of community based resources that they could use to help best support students mental health needs or in many cases resources are limited to families due to long wait lists or no openings. Resources could include but not limited to; case management, outpatient therapy, support groups or medication management.

Given the limitations of community based resources and the spike of mental health and substance abuse within our local and state wide schools, teachers, social workers are at the forefront in best supporting and managing students behaviors and treatment needs, which can often involve parents. To help reduce the frequency and duration(s) of students emotional difficulties/behaviors at schools and or need to bridge community base services with students, school districts state wide need to make working with and treating (at times) a priority. Schools need to hire social workers who have experience in the field and that can also train educators on how best to work with students who have these concerns at school. Students will never be able to be fully "available" to learn and grow socially if mental health issues are current in a child's life.