

## School-Based and School-Linked Mental Health Vision

The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) is committed to increasing access to effective mental health support for young people. Schools can be a particularly important access point for children and youth - especially those who may not have ready access elsewhere in their communities - to receive the mental health care they need. This document represents NCYL's high-level vision for school environments and practices that support a student's social, emotional, and mental health needs and overall well-being. It is intended to guide conversations about what effective mental health support can look like in schools.

### Supportive schools are...

Centers of learning, wellness, and healing

Spaces where students feel safe (both physically and emotionally), respected, and supported

- › Students are not traumatized by police presence, school hardening, or student surveillance at school
- › Students feel included and connected
- › Students have trusting relationships with positive adult supports at school
- › Students have strong peer relationships at school
- › Students feel part of a larger school community

Spaces that affirm students' full and multifaceted identity and support LGBTQI+ students

Spaces where students learn how and feel empowered to express their needs and ask for help

Spaces where students find hope and build on their strengths



### Supportive schools provide...

An inclusive climate that proactively promotes positive mental health for all students

Regular opportunities to identify and meet its students' social, emotional, and mental health needs

- › Identification and support of mental health needs is conducted in trauma-informed, culturally-responsive, non-punitive ways that center, support and empower youth
- › Screening and other tools are used proactively to identify and address needs before they escalate to crises
- › Student confidentiality is granted and honored; this includes not sharing confidential health information with law enforcement, school security staff, or others who may misuse the information for disciplinary, punitive, or stigmatizing purposes, and creating an avenue for students to access and consent on their own to confidential mental health services, when necessary and legally appropriate

- › Implementation of referral pathways (processes and procedures) to meet student needs and link students to other community partners/resources

Multiple tiers of support to meet different student need levels

- › Limited English proficiency is not a barrier for families to help their kids access the mental health supports they need

Educationally related mental health services as appropriate under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Opportunities for mental health awareness and promotion and social-emotional learning (SEL)

- › Students are taught the language they need to express their mental health and social-emotional needs and have opportunities to practice these skills
- › Implementation of age- and developmentally-appropriate mental health curriculum for all students
- › Support for student-led organizations and peer support initiatives that promote student mental health and well-being

Strategies to reduce mental health stigmas among students and families

Help and connections for students and families to meet their basic needs (i.e. food, housing insecurity, safety), which promotes positive mental health

- › Either through school services like CA universal school meals, or connecting/referring students to outside providers

Regular training to teachers, staff, and administrators on best practices for mental health treatment

Opportunities for extracurricular, athletic, creative or other non-academic activities to enjoy with peers and adults

Mechanisms to regularly gather and incorporate youth and family input about what they need, how services are working, and what they need more or less of



## Supportive schools recognize...

Mental health and wellness is a racial justice issue and requires structural changes, not only individual supports

Mental health and learning are deeply connected

Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness

Mental health is impacted by the school and community environment, including classroom and school size, experience and training of school personnel, availability of sufficient personnel

School-based and school-linked services are tools for increasing healthy equity

Prevention, early identification, and intervention by mental health professionals are critical, and schools can play a role in supporting this

Effective support must be culturally responsive, strengths-based, anti-racist, non-stigmatizing, and designed to meet the holistic needs of youth with intersectional identities

Youth are the experts on their own lives, and youth voice and perspective should be integrated into school programs and strategies

## Supportive schools are funded and staffed to meet student needs...

Schools should have the funding necessary to hire adequate school staff that support student health needs, and to contract with or connect students with outside mental health providers for ongoing, intensive support

Schools should hire and retain staff that reflects the background and experiences of the students and community they are serving

Schools should understand privacy and confidentiality considerations, including how to structure staffing and service delivery such that confidential services can be provided under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)



Schools should have the knowledge and resources they need to leverage and maximize existing school funding streams (including Medicaid) available to support students' mental health, so that cost is not a barrier to care in schools

Schools should support access to non-Western, culturally-rooted promising practices or methods of healing

## Supportive schools do not...

Operate in silos. They should regularly coordinate with health system providers

Mischaracterize social and emotional needs as "bad behavior," which often leads to punitive disciplinary action instead of support, and disproportionately impacts students of color, students with disabilities, and students from other historically marginalized populations

Misuse mental health screenings or services for purposes of conducting "threat assessments"

Ignore the changing dynamics of what is happening in the student's life or push students out of their school



## Key Resources on School Mental Health

**School Mental Health 101: A Primer for Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans**

**Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students**

**Practical Guide for Financing Social, Emotional, and Mental Health in Schools**

**Improving Coordination and Access to Comprehensive-School Based Mental Health Services in California**

**State of Student Wellness**

**HIPAA FERPA: A Primer on Sharing School Health Information**

**Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities**

**Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students' Social and Emotional Well-Being**

**Creating Identity-Safe Schools and Classrooms**

**Youth-Centered Strategies for Hope, Healing and Health**

**Foundational Practices of Healing-Centered Community Schools**

**Five Strategies for Developing a School-Wide Culture of Healing**