

Supporting student mental health during COVID-19 campus closures

CSBA WEBINAR – MAY 20, 2020



Spring 2020 mental health services

While the 2020 year has almost concluded, it is helpful to understand how the local educational agencies have been addressing the mental health needs of students during the COVID-19 campus closures. Below are a few questions you might find helpful in discussing your LEA's practices during this period of distance learning:

- » **How have the district's counselors and/or social workers been interacting with students during distance learning?**
 - › What platforms are they using? How successful would staff say those platform options have been?
 - › For those that previously ran small groups, how are those being continued remotely?
 - › For students receiving individual support, what percentage are continuing to access this support?
 - › Have services expanded to support additional students who are experiencing newly-reported mental health challenges during the campus closures?
- » **Does our LEA currently offer telehealth services to students via phone or video?**
- » **How are we continuing to provide services for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans that include behavioral/emotional supports?**
- » **What proportion of students that were receiving services prior to the campus closures are still accessing support?**
 - › When supports are no longer being used, do we know the reasons? What are they (e.g., lack of physical privacy to discuss sensitive issues, internet connectivity, etc.)?
- » **Are staff reporting an increase in the number of students that need mental health supports or services?**
 - › Are there patterns they are observing that could help determine the LEA's strategy for increasing support?
- » **If your LEA provides a resources page for families during COVID-19 closures, are there resources listed for parents/guardians to address the well-being of children in the home (e.g., online substance abuse support groups, domestic violence hotlines, etc.)?**
- » **Where can parents/guardians access information about whom to contact if their child appears to be struggling emotionally during campus closures?**
- » **What resources are available for families in terms of:**
 - › Speaking with their children about the pandemic?
 - › Activities that can reduce anxiety or excessive worry?
 - › Behavioral signs that suggest the need for additional emotional support?
 - › What should parents do if they have a student experiencing extreme distress?

Assessing needs during spring 2020 closures

It is particularly challenging during campus closures to assess students' well-being. For example, without direct, face-to-face interactions, many areas have reported a decline in child abuse reports, though it is unlikely abuse has declined during this challenging time. Video conferences and emails make it difficult for teachers to engage with students in the ways they normally do. It's worth asking what measures the LEA has in place to ensure students do not fall through the cracks during a time of increased social isolation, and for many, economic stress or concerns about the health of themselves and loved ones. Furthermore, students that might not have previously received mental health services might need additional support now. Below are a few questions you might consider asking of your superintendent or other district leaders:

- » **How do we know which students are experiencing mental health issues?**
 - › Do our teachers have an opportunity to informally check in with students and families?



- › Have we developed a process for engaging with students and families for whom there is a concern that more support is needed?
 - › Has that process been communicated clearly to staff?
- » **Do we have data that can help identify which students might need additional support during the campus closures?**

Planning for fall 2020

Once you have a sense of current practices and resources, you can begin planning for the fall. Regardless of the form instruction takes when school resumes, LEAs will need to attend to the emotional well-being of students when they begin classes. This cohort of students has experienced prolonged social isolation during a global pandemic. Many have family members who lost their jobs, and economic stressors will touch all school communities. Students may know people who have been ill or died because of COVID-19, and they themselves may have been sick. For students to be able to learn, we cannot ignore their mental health needs.

There is time this summer to plan for the supports that students will need. While the budget crisis makes this planning exponentially harder, with some creativity, LEAs can use partnerships and work with existing staff to access resources. Below are some questions you might find useful when discussing plans for fall 2020:

- » **How are staff planning to support the social-emotional and mental health needs of students in the fall?**
- › What additional professional development might Pupil Personnel Services staff need (e.g., school psychologists, counselors and social workers)?
 - › What additional professional development might certificated and/or classified staff need?
 - › How could our LEA help staff access remote professional learning opportunities this summer?
 - › If students must continue distance learning in some fashion next year, how might our mental health support options shift?
 - › What will teachers do to build connections with their students in the new year? Do we have social-emotional learning activities or curricula available?

- » **Has your administration engaged with Pupil Personnel Services staff this spring to assess the successes and challenges they encountered during distance learning?**
- › If so, do they have recommendations for a plan to adapt their support in the fall?
 - › Are there ways they could shift some duties (e.g., master schedule planning) to make better use of their specialized training and increase student support?
- » **Do we have enough staff with training in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices to meet the needs of our students?**
- » **Does our LEA have an existing relationship with the county behavioral/mental health department to help students access mental health services?**
- » **Does our county office of education have mental health and/or social-emotional learning resources, including professional development, that we could draw upon?**
- » **Are there other community resources we might be able to draw upon for partnerships in the fall?**

