

## **Policy Memo Introduction**

Across the United States, students are facing a mental health crisis that schools are struggling to meet. At a time when school-based mental health services are more necessary than ever, recent federal policy decisions have jeopardized their expansion and sustainability. My policy memo will explore the consequences of cuts to school mental health funding under the Trump administration, examine their impact on students' access to behavioral health support, and propose policy solutions that prioritize continuity, equity, and holistic well-being. This issue holds personal and professional significance for me, as I currently work with ThriveKids, a school-based care coordination initiative in Louisiana, which provides students with behavioral health support in educational settings.

### **Significance**

School-based mental health services are often the first, and sometimes the only, source of care for children and adolescents experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma, or behavioral issues. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, up to 80% of children who need mental health services rely on schools as their primary access point. When federal funding and infrastructure to support these programs are rolled back, it places an unsustainable burden on under-resourced districts, educators, and school counselors.

The Trump administration's termination of school-based mental health grant programs, particularly those tied to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) frameworks, represents a significant setback. These programs had been established to support historically underserved students, including youth of color, LGBTQ+ students, and those with disabilities. Without them, school systems lose vital staff, training opportunities, and infrastructure to respond to escalating

student mental health needs. For programs like ThriveKids, these cuts challenge efforts to create school environments that center trauma-informed care, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility.

### **Why I selected the topic**

As someone working directly with school-based behavioral health initiatives, I see the real-time impact of resource shortages on students, families, and frontline staff. ThriveKids was designed to bridge the gap between mental and physical health by embedding social workers and counselors in schools, outpatient counseling, and care coordination, including targeted reentry support for youth recovering from trauma or exiting juvenile detention. While this model is effective, its sustainability depends on supportive policy environments and funding streams. When federal programs are defunded, the ripple effect is immediate: fewer personnel, fewer services, and ultimately, more students falling through the cracks.

This topic also speaks to the broader policy questions of how we, as a society, prioritize youth well-being. The defunding of school mental health services reflects not only budgetary decisions but also ideological conflicts over DEI, student identity, and the role of public education in advancing equity. By focusing my policy memo on this issue, I hope to advocate for evidence-based investments that recognize mental health as foundational to academic success and long-term health outcomes.

## **Media Coverage and Framing**

The national media has recently followed the policy shifts impacting school-based mental health funding. A recent Associated Press (2025) article details how the Trump administration rolled back a number of grants designed to support student mental health and wellness, citing opposition to DEI-based programs. The piece highlights how these cuts disproportionately harm students in marginalized communities, many of whom rely on schools for access to mental health care.

Similarly, NPR (2025) reports that many states and school districts were forced to cancel planned expansions of mental health services after losing anticipated federal support. The article includes voices from educators and parents who describe rising student distress and inadequate support in schools now scrambling to meet demand.

Finally, MSNBC (2025) covers the legal response, noting that several states have filed lawsuits against the federal government, arguing that the cuts endanger public health and violate students' rights to safe and supportive learning environments. Together, these articles underscore a troubling trend: mental health has become a political battleground, and students could be paying the price.

## **Conclusion**

School-based mental health programs are an essential public infrastructure. The rollback of federal support for these services represents not only a funding crisis but a moral one. As I continue to work with ThriveKids, I see firsthand the importance of embedding mental health services in educational environments. My memo will examine policy options to restore and protect funding for school-based care, particularly those grounded in equity and cultural

responsiveness. Investing in student mental health shouldn't be seen as optional; it should be urgent.

## References

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