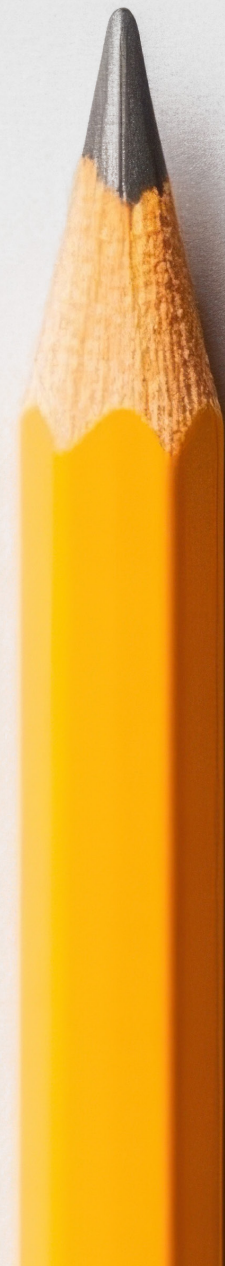The Real State of Schools

Rising Student Behavioral & Mental Health Needs (and Solutions)

AXiOM EHR

Sounding the Alarm on Student Mental Health

Each school year, behavioral and mental health challenges among K–12 students grow more urgent. These issues don't just affect individual students—they ripple across entire school communities, influencing classroom dynamics, academic outcomes, and even school funding.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, the rate of diagnosed mental or behavioral health conditions in adolescents rose **35% between 2016 and 2023**, jumping from 15% to over 20%.

Yet, the responsibility to address these rising needs continues to fall on the shoulders of too few, with a chronically understaffed and overstretched school mental health workforce expected to answer the call.

The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1. But during the 2022–2023 school year, the national average was **385:1**, with more than a dozen states exceeding 400:1.

In Arizona, the ratio reached a staggering **667:1**.
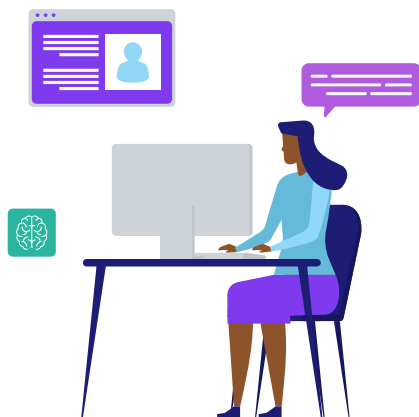
Consequences of Falling Behind

Mental health teams are chasing a runaway kite, doing their best to catch up with limited time, staff, and resources. But the consequences of under-resourced support and poor student mental health are well documented:

» Declining academic performance

» Chronic absenteeism that threatens funding

» Cyclical, disruptive bullying

» Links to resources and next steps

Resources & Solutions Covered in This Guide

School counselors, psychologists, and administrators can't—and shouldn't—face these challenges alone. This guide offers a roadmap for schools to:

» Understand the current state of school mental and behavioral health

» Identify the key drivers behind rising student needs

» Recognize common barriers to support

» Explore proven strategies and tools to overcome those barriers

» Access resources and actionable next steps

NEXT
The State of School Mental and Behavioral Health Today

The State of Student Mental & Behavioral Health

The statistics speak for themselves. Student mental health concerns are rising, adding pressure to already overloaded school support teams.

KEY STATS:

→ Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are now among the **top causes of illness and disability among adolescents globally**.

→ Diagnosed anxiety among U.S. students rose **61%, and depression rose 45%** between 2016 and 2023.

→ **Suicide is now the second leading cause of death** among youth aged 10 to 14.

Mental Health Teams:
Experiencing Burnout & High Turnover

Even as student needs climb, school mental health teams are facing their own crisis:

80.9%

Counselor retention dropped significantly in 2022, with only 80.9% returning to the same school the following fall. And some counselors left education altogether, making shifts to different fields and creating hard-to-fill vacancies.

73%

of school counselors reported **elevated emotional exhaustion** in a recent study.

Why This Matters for School Performance

When students struggle mentally or behaviorally, it impacts every aspect of school life. These conditions are linked to performance metrics spanning academic performance, bullying, and chronic absenteeism.

> "If a child is dysregulated, they are not going to be in the thinking part of the brain which is associated with learning, that means that they are sitting in class and aren't able to encode that information."

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

For example, behind bad weather, **the second most common cause of absence among American high schoolers (16%) during the 2022-2023 academic year was "anxiety"** according to a survey.

BULLYING

When students suffer mentally, the overall school climate is affected. **Bullying—whether in-person or online—continues to affect 18–31% of students**, fueling academic challenges and mental distress, and impacting attendance sheets.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE & FUNDING

State funding formulas often rely on attendance and enrollment. Missed days = lost dollars for schools in many states.

Armeda Wojciak
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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What's Driving the Rise in Student Needs?

What's Driving the Rise in Student Needs?

Several major shifts over the past decade have contributed to the growing student mental health crisis. We've seen a rise of smartphone and social media use among K-12 students, and a seismic shift in education and students' home lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 MORE SCREENS, LESS FACE TIME

» Smartphone ownership among 8-year-olds (typically 2nd and 3rd graders) jumped 181% between 2015 and 2022.

» Between 2019 and 2020, screen time among youth increased by **4%**.

» According to Pew Research, the majority of teens in school communities used some form of social media on a daily basis.

3 THE DECLINE OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

» In 2010, **44%** of high school seniors said they met friends in person almost every day. By 2022, that percentage dropped to 32%.

» Even after pandemic lockdowns ended, trends towards self-isolation and reliance on online interactions remained high.

2 THE LASTING IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about several key changes in mental and behavioral health:

» Stress in students' homes surged due to job loss, illness, and uncertainty.

» Eating disorder hospitalizations among ages 6–20 saw a sharp rise, with 60% being first-time hospitalizations.

» Reports to Child Protective Services dropped significantly—with fewer staff able to interact with students in person, many cases went unnoticed.

» Pediatric trauma increased, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

4 TOO FEW AVAILABLE MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

High student-to-counselor ratios and high mental health staffing turnovers have led to a treatment gap for students in need.

» During the 2021–2022 academic year, only **49%** of public schools offered diagnostic mental health assessments.

» Just **38%** offered treatment services.

Spotlight

60%

of children with major depressive disorder go untreated.

NEXT
Challenges Schools Face Today

Challenges Schools Face Today

While it's critical to understand the size of the problem and its root causes, schools face real barriers that prevent them from addressing these issues effectively.

**As behavioral health needs rise, schools are left to do more with less.**

UNDERFUNDED SYSTEMS

America underfunds K–12 public education by nearly **$150 billion annually**. This makes it harder to hire and retain qualified staff, implement new programs, or invest in technology that could ease the burden.

COMPETING PRIORITIES

School leaders don't have the luxury of focusing on one area of need while ignoring others. When mental and behavioral health needs continue to rise, administrators are left shuffling the deck to cover key areas:

» **A growing teacher shortage**, linked to increased expenditures for recruitment, substitute teachers, and training.

» **Dips in student academic performance over the last decade**, with school staff responsible for helping students recover from pandemic learning challenges, socioeconomic disparities, and mental health challenges.

» **A need to constantly adapt to changes** in educational policy, curricula, technology, safety and security keeps administrators busy.
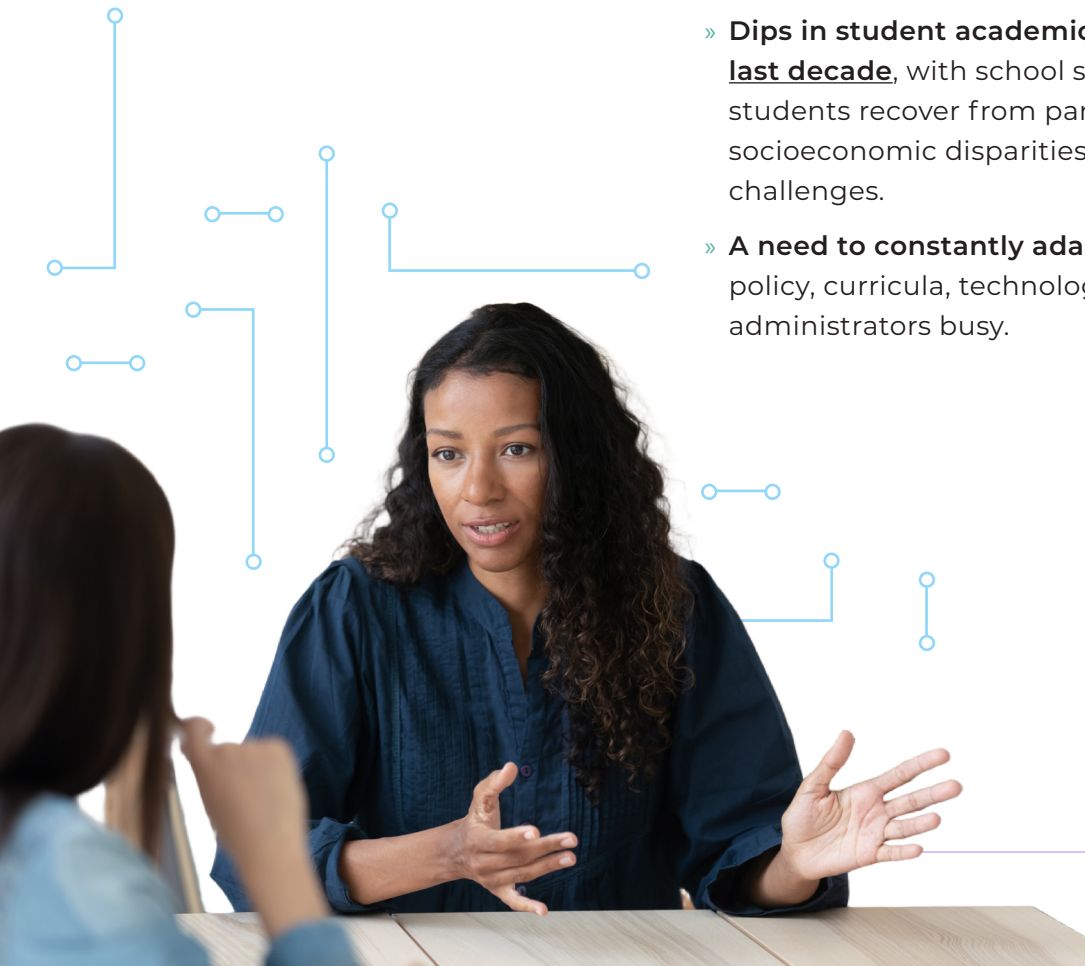
A WIDESPREAD STAFFING SHORTAGE

One of the most significant barriers to addressing student mental health needs is a **shortage of qualified staff**. Even districts with strong leadership and a clear understanding of the problem struggle to recruit and retain the personnel they need.

Counselors, social workers, and school psychologists are in short supply—and when schools do find great people, they often lose them to burnout or more competitive pay elsewhere.

The consequences:

» Longer wait times for student support

» Limited capacity to follow up with families or coordinate care

» Increased stress on existing staff, leading to faster turnover

Hiring and keeping school mental health professionals requires more than just funding— it takes tools, training, and systems that reduce daily burdens so they can focus on taking care of students.

The good news:
Increasing help where it's needed, at the root, can improve our overall outlook.

A New School Order: Addressing Mental Health Challenges with New Strategies

Despite the challenges, schools can take meaningful steps forward. Addressing student mental and behavioral health requires a proactive, community-based, and tech-supported approach.

ADOPTING A MULTIDISCIPLINARY, WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Building a culture of awareness around student mental health is the first step toward meaningful change. But awareness alone isn't enough—lasting impact requires the support of the entire school community. From the classroom to the counselor's office, from the kitchen table to the hallway, everyone has a role to play in recognizing needs and supporting care plans. When schools engage caregivers, educators, and staff at every level, they create a stronger, more capable support system—and help reduce stigma along the way.

Schools across the country are adopting new strategies to create more supportive environments:

» Mental health awareness days at school with opportunities for caregivers to volunteer

» Social media campaigns with shareable statistics and special dates highlighted (great templates exist so you don't have to start from scratch!)

» Student-designed school social spaces to foster peer connection and reduce social isolation

» "Calm-down corners" in classrooms to encourage emotional regulation

» Whole-school programs teaching conflict resolution and coping skills (with positive results documented by our <u>neighbors across the pond</u>)

These efforts build awareness, reduce stigma, and help everyone play a part in supporting student well-being.

🖐 INVESTING IN STAFF WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Supporting students starts with supporting the adults who care for them. When teachers, counselors, and school staff are overwhelmed or burned out, it becomes even harder to meet the rising mental health needs of students.

Schools can implement strategies that promote staff well-being, such as:

» Offering regular mental health days or "wellness hours" for staff

» Offering access to confidential counseling or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

» Creating staff-only spaces designed for relaxation or decompression

» Integrating mental health check-ins during staff meetings

» Training leaders to recognize and respond to signs of burnout

When staff feel seen, supported, and mentally healthy themselves, they're more able—and more likely—to show up for students in meaningful ways.

💻 LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO EXPAND CAPACITY

While tech can contribute to student stress, the right technology can also offer solutions—especially for overwhelmed staff.

An electronic health record (EHR) system built for schools can help:

» Document and share mental health information securely

» Stay HIPAA compliant

» Track student progress and outcomes

» Save time on documentation and coordination

» Reduce burnout and increase service capacity

NEXT
Introducing AxiomEHR: Technology for Schools ›

Technology for Schools

AxiomEHR is a modern EHR software platform for schools providing mental and behavioral health services. With a dedicated team with decades of experience, AxiomEHR empowers schools to:
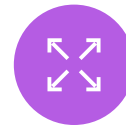
Work securely from anywhere

Manage student records and documentation easily

Comply with privacy laws

Use telehealth to expand their flexibility and reach

Customize forms, access permissions, and workflow approvals

Track services, progress, and outcomes with ease

Bill according to state-specific requirements

Get flat-fee pricing and responsive support

NEXT
Conclusions & Next Steps

Next Steps

The challenges are real—but so are the solutions. Schools don't have to wait for the next wave of funding or policy reform. They can take action now to support students and staff.

TWO STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TODAY

(1) **Take a closer look at your current support systems:** Assess how your school is currently identifying, documenting, and responding to student mental health needs. Are there gaps in staffing, workflows, or communication? Use this insight to prioritize what needs improvement—and where tools like AxiomEHR can help.

(2) **Schedule a free demo of AxiomEHR:** See how our school-specific EHR software can help your team save time, reduce burnout, and support more students—without increasing your workload. AxiomEHR is designed to simplify documentation, streamline care coordination, and meet school-based mental health requirements.

The need is urgent—and the time to act is now.

The mental and behavioral health needs of students are only growing—but with the right tools and support, your school can rise to meet the challenge. Let AxiomEHR help you simplify your processes, support your staff, and care for more students.

Ready to see what **AxiomEHR** can do for your school?

Schedule a free demo today.

[axiomehr.com]