



**WHAT WE DO**

**Bring Stakeholders Together**

Given the mental health challenges our children and youth face, a group of stakeholders representing diverse backgrounds and experiences related to the provision of mental health services to children and youth formed the North Carolina School Mental Health Initiative (NC SMHI) in August, 2015. NC SMHI is a multi-disciplinary partnership consisting of public educators, community-based mental health clinicians, lawyers, NC state department officials, advocates, university faculty, and parents with the following mission:

*It is the mission of this partnership to develop recommendations for policy and/or legislative changes to ensure that public school students in North Carolina have equitable access to a full continuum of high-quality and well-coordinated mental health services.*

**Gather and Analyze NC Data**

This year, NC SMHI collected and analyzed NC data regarding perceptions of and access to mental health services for our children and youth via two surveys and six focus groups across the state. The surveys and focus groups served as a critical first step in the development of recommendations for policy and/or legislative action on behalf of North Carolina children and youth.

**Develop recommendations**

A detailed report including a literature review, description of study methodology, and a series of practical recommendations for policy and lawmakers has been generated. The recommendations are summarized in this brief and reflect the changes required to ensure all NC students have access to a continuum of high quality and well-coordinated mental health and substance use services.

**North Carolina School Mental Health Initiative  
Recommendations  
Fall, 2016**

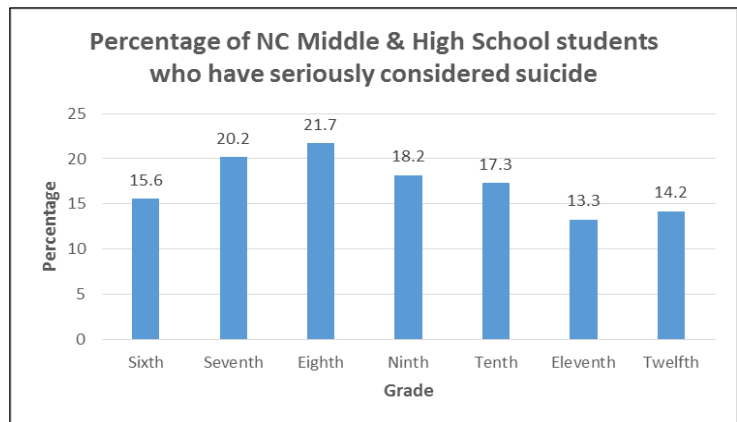
**Current Status of Mental Health in Children and Youth**

Mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, and substance abuse.

Nearly 1 in 5 NC students have a mental health and/or substance use disorder; of those, 75% will NOT receive treatment in the current system.

Annual Prevalence of Any Mental Health Disorder, Students 8-15 yrs	
United States	North Carolina
13.1%	19%

Suicide was the second leading cause of death among people aged 10-24 and, in North Carolina, the total number of youth suicides has doubled in recent years.



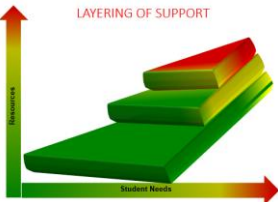


**Why Address Mental Health and Substance Use at School?**

Schools have been identified as the natural and best setting for mental health prevention and treatment services. For students with the most intensive needs, the existence of school based mental health centers are 21 times more likely to be utilized by students than other types of mental health treatment centers.

In alignment with the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model \(WSCC\)](#), a consistently funded and implemented model is necessary to establish effective, mental health services for children and adolescents in North Carolina.



## NC School Mental Health Initiative Recommendations

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Recommendation #1</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Create a Continuum of Supports and Services</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Recommendation #2</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Make it Sustainable</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Recommendation #3</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Engage Stakeholders</b></p> 
<p><b>Issue:</b> Currently, mental health and substance use services across NC schools are fragmented, reactive, or non-existent. Too often, mental health and substance use needs are not addressed until the student and family are in crisis and academic progress is impacted.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> A continuum of mental health and substance use supports is necessary for all students to be fully engaged in the learning process.</p> <p><b>Implementation Strategies:</b> Public schools, families, community providers, managed care organizations, and other payors will jointly create a plan for meeting the mental health and substance use needs of all NC public school students. The continuum will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Education of staff and students pre-K-12</li> <li>○ Promotion of healthy school communities</li> <li>○ Universal screening</li> <li>○ Supplemental supports</li> <li>○ Intensive services for students and families</li> </ul> <p>To ensure accountability, the plan will include a system to evaluate the quality of mental health and substance use services and measure student outcomes.</p>	<p><b>Issue:</b> Students face unnecessary barriers to accessing supports funded by private and public insurance in the school setting. Schools need additional qualified providers to support the mental health and substance use needs of students to create successful learners.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Children and families need benefits that are accessible across various entrance portals and regardless of county of residence or ability to pay. To that end, a workforce of school providers that is staffed in sufficient numbers is needed.</p> <p><b>Implementation Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create incentives for memoranda of agreement between schools, community providers, and payors</li> <li>● Eliminate barriers to accessing services at school through Medicaid</li> <li>● Create infrastructure for public schools to be recognized by commercial healthcare insurance companies as providers of mental health and substance use services</li> <li>● Employ sufficient numbers of supported and licensed Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) (school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers)</li> <li>● Replicate sustainable practices, such as existing university-school partnerships</li> <li>● Make mental health and substance use a required component of professional development for all school staff and boards of education</li> </ul>	<p><b>Issue:</b> Families, students, schools, and community providers are disconnected. Limited communication across stakeholders results in inadequate and/or duplicated mental health and substance use services.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Engage all stakeholders to create and sustain collaborative, coordinated mental health and substance use supports and services for students.</p> <p><b>Implementation Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dedicate school resources to build partnerships with families and community mental health and substance use providers</li> <li>● Establish, leverage, and/or strengthen local collaboratives to ensure consistent participation by local mental health and substance use partners/stakeholders</li> <li>● Map and communicate local mental health and substance use supports and services for students, including providers</li> <li>● Expand MCO and other payors visibility, involvement, and collaboration with local mental health and substance use partners/stakeholders</li> <li>● Simplify family/student access to community mental health and substance use supports and services</li> <li>● Remove barriers to the exchange of information across schools, families, and agencies</li> </ul>

Access the [Executive Summary](#) and [full report](#) of the NC School Mental Health Initiative