

For Immediate Release
August 5, 2013



New Report on Engaging Schools to Meet the Mental Health Needs of Children in Connecticut

Farmington, CT – [The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut \(CHDI\)](#) released a new *IMPACT* report today: ***“Improving Outcomes for Children in Schools: Expanded School Mental Health”***. The report examines available mental health services in school settings in Connecticut and summarizes the benefits and challenges of expanding these services to meet the current need. It also offers a framework to guide policy development and systems reforms as the State considers the best ways to address mental health and safety in our schools.

“Schools are in an excellent position to act as hubs and connect children to school-based and school-linked mental health services in the community” said Dr. Robert Franks, Vice President for Mental Health Initiatives and Director of the Connecticut Center for Effective Practice at CHDI. “Most schools have limited resources for providing direct mental health services to students, but they can expand that capacity by collaborating with families, community-based mental health centers and local health departments.”

In fact, Connecticut has some of the highest quality community-based children’s mental health treatments available in the United States. Unfortunately, Connecticut falls short in connecting children to that care. It is estimated that 160,000 children in Connecticut may experience a diagnosable and treatable emotional-behavioral problem and only 20% of these children are able to access the care they need. Schools play a critical role. Research shows that children receive mental health services in schools more frequently than any other setting, however the level of care is not sufficient.

“Schools that successfully link children with behavioral and emotional issues to mental health services improve outcomes for both the children and for the school” said a co-author of the report and CHDI Senior Associate, Dr. Jeana Bracey. “Schools addressing mental health often see a decrease in student arrests and bullying and an improvement in academic achievement, school climate and school safety.”

The *IMPACT* report highlights [Connecticut’s School-Based Diversion Initiative \(SBDI\)](#) program as an example of how the principles of expanded school mental health are working to meet the needs of students. Since 2009 seventeen Connecticut schools have used SBDI to connect students at risk of arrest to mental health services. SBDI is supported and overseen by the Judicial Branch’s Court Support Services Division, the Department of Children and Families and the State Department of Education. CHDI has coordinated the implementation of the initiative.

“SBDI offers training to teachers and school professionals to identify behavioral health problems and connect children to school and community-based mental health services including Connecticut’s localized Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) teams as an alternative to calling law enforcement” said the *IMPACT*’s co-author and CHDI Associate Director, Dr. Jeffrey Vanderploeg. “The program results in significant decreases in school arrests and increased usage of EMPS services.”

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Based on the lessons learned from implementing SBDI, the “*Improving Outcomes for Children in Schools: Expanded School Mental Health*” IMPACT report offers policy makers and school administrators ten recommendations for guiding and organizing the state’s efforts towards improving mental health and academic outcomes for youth. Among these are developing a statewide plan; training school personnel; supporting collaboration efforts between schools, communities and law enforcement; increasing the capacity of EMPS; and expanding school-based health centers in Connecticut.

Click [here](#) to download a copy of CHDI’s IMPACT “*Improving Outcomes for Children in Schools: Expanded School Mental Health*.”

Additional information about SBDI and expanded school mental health in Connecticut can be found by viewing CHDI’s [Issue Brief 19: Best Practices in School Mental Health \(2/20/13\)](#) or visiting <http://www.chdi.org/ccep-initiatives.php?type=current#i18>.

Information for parents on mental health in schools, including how mental health affects the way a child learns and tips for navigating school systems, can be found at: <http://www.kidsmentalhealthinfo.com/mental-health-in-schools.php>.

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