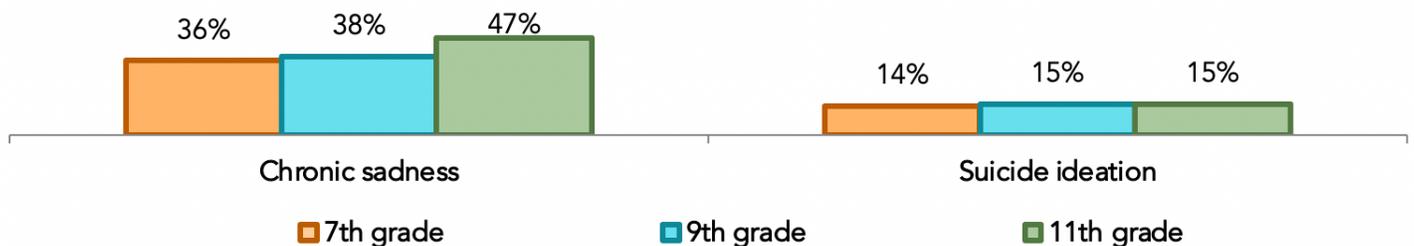


Youth Mental Health and Supports: 2020-2021 California Snapshot

Youth’s mental health can directly affect their ability to learn and succeed in school and beyond, yet most with mental health concerns do not receive necessary care. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures had profound effects on youth mental health leading to the U.S. Surgeon General issuing a General Advisory highlighting the urgent need to address the crisis.¹ This brief describes data on the mental health needs of secondary students in California from two cross-sectional surveys administered during the 2020-21 school year.² Although data are not necessarily representative of all students or principals, they provide insights into the mental health needs and supports of secondary students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student Report of Mental Health: As shown below, about one-third of 7th and 9th graders and half of 11th graders experienced chronic sadness, and about 15% of all secondary students considered suicide.



Principals Report Concern for Student Mental Health: Nearly all California principals surveyed reported that social, emotional, and mental health problems were either very common (45%) or moderate (41%) issues in their schools in the 2020-2021 school year.

Students Seeking Support from Adults: Most students (77%) reported that if someone their age felt very sad, stressed, lonely or depressed, talking to an adult could help them feel better. Yet, 1 out of 3 students reported they did not know where to go at school for help if they felt this way, and 2 out of 5 did not have an adult they could talk to about their problems.

Although 1 out of 5 students wanted to talk to a counselor or therapist about mental health concerns in the past year, only half of those who wanted help reported getting it when needed.

Students Report Barriers to Receiving Mental Health Care: The most commonly reported barriers to seeking mental health care if students were feeling very sad, stressed, lonely or depressed were:

- Counselor/therapists wouldn’t understand (25%)
- Parent/guardians might find out (24%)
- People would think there’s something wrong with me (21%)
- Other students might find out (18%)

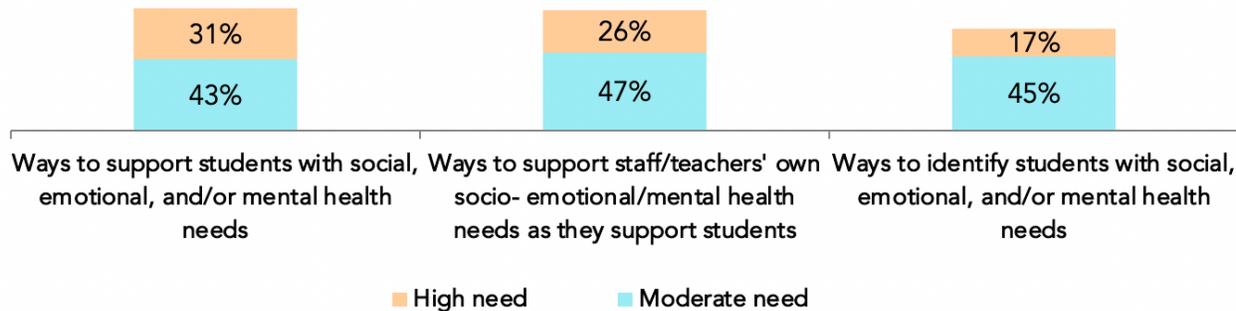


¹ Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory: Accessed on February 2, 2022, from: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>

² Data sources: 1) *California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) Mental Health Supports* module, completed by 12,481 students in 7th, 9th, and 11th grade in 51 California schools; and 2) *Statewide Principals Survey*, completed by 954 principals, representing 10% of public schools.

California Principals Report Barriers to Providing Mental Health Care: 1 out of 5 reported their schools had a waitlist for mental health services. The most common reported barriers to service provision were lack of funding (60%), access issues due to distance learning (58%), and lack of school-based (55%) and community-based providers (52%).

Need for School Staff Professional Development: California principals reported a need for school staff professional development or training to identify students in need, and to better support students as well as their own mental health needs.



Project Cal-Well Provides a Model for Schools: The California Department of Education’s (CDE) Project Cal-Well initiative can serve as a model for schools to support students’ mental health. The three key components include:

1. School wide interventions, which can prevent the development of problem behaviors by creating positive school climates that promote healthy social-emotional development for ALL students. Professional development for school staff can help them to identify and refer students in need of support.
2. Targeted interventions that provide focused services to students who are at risk for mental health concerns.
3. More intensive, individualized services for students with significant needs provided through strong partnerships with community mental health providers.

Additional detail on Project Cal-Well’s successful strategies can be found here:

<https://healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/school-health-services-evaluation#currentprojects>

Data Collection Resources: The CDE and West Ed have collaborated to develop the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys. The following surveys are particularly useful for schools to monitor the mental health needs of their communities and are available from: <https://calschls.org/>:

- The *California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)* is a statewide student survey of protective factors, risk behaviors, and school climate. Available to all schools, the *CHKS Mental Health Supports Module* assesses students’ mental health needs, perceptions of stigma, and access and barriers to care: https://calschls.org/survey-administration/downloads/#esm_cal-well
- The *California School Staff Survey* assesses the perceptions and experiences of school staff and administration regarding constructs asked of students in the CHKS, as well as the learning and working environment, the scope of student supports, programs, and services, and parent supports and involvement. The *Student Wellness Module* explores staff perceptions of students’ emotional wellness and mental health needs and the availability of services to address these needs: https://calschls.org/site/assets/files/1103/csss-wellness_2122_final.pdf.

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