

Thrive Alliance Group

# FUNDING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS





## THE GROWING NEED... AND THE GROWING COST

If your school district has been experiencing a spike in cases of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues among students, you're not alone. Not only has this problem spread across every community, but it's affecting children at younger ages – as early as kindergarten.

The outcomes include rising rates of school refusal and disciplinary action along with lower academic achievement and graduation rates. In the worst cases, mental illness can lead to suicide and violent acts that put the entire school population at risk.

**And, experts predict that a year of disrupted learning due to the pandemic will prompt another spike in mental health issues for students and even for school staff.**

Chances are, you are painfully aware of the impact mental health issues have on student achievement, your school's performance, and your district budget. Students struggling with emotional and behavioral problems simply cannot access the full benefit of their education without help. Without the necessary support in place, you're forced to send students out of district, which comes with a big hit to your budget: averaging as much as \$90,000 per student plus the cost of transportation.



## THE DECISION YOU FACE

Here's what we are seeing: district leaders are increasingly concerned about what's happening, and they are eager to provide school-based solutions that help students to succeed. This strategy serves another critical need: helping to reduce the cost of out-of-district placements.

The problem is, educators (even social workers and school psychologists) may not have the training and experience to effectively support students with mental illness. Yet bringing in expert resources costs money. And funding is tight.

You might assume you'll have to cut other programs to free up funding for a mental health support program. And that might not be a popular decision.

## THE GOOD NEWS

### **1. School-based mental health support programs allow schools to keep some students in-district.**

Keeping students in district who would otherwise be placed in therapeutic schools reduces the cost of out-of-district tuition and transportation. In most cases, that savings can easily pay for the cost of the mental health support program, which serves many more children and elevates the performance of the entire school.

### **2. Funding is available for mental health support programs if you know where to look.**

You really don't have to sacrifice other programs to provide support for student mental health.

In this guide, we'll show you how you can take advantage of some funding sources you're already familiar with to pay for student mental health programs. And we'll share some funding sources you may not know about, including new government funding for education.



## STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCES

Chances are, your district is already receiving funding under some of the following sources. The question is, are you fully utilizing every aspect of each funding source? Many districts overlook ways to qualify for additional funds. As impacts from the pandemic disruption become apparent, you have the option to amend your current applications and reallocate funds for mental health support.

If someone else in your district is responsible for submitting applications (such as your BA, Superintendent, or County Supervisor), start with a discussion with that person.

### CARES ACT EDUCATIONAL STABILIZATION FUND (ESSER II)

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), Congress has dedicated an **Educational Stabilization Fund (ESSER II)** for K-12 schools and higher education. **Programs to support mental health for students and staff are among the approved uses of these funds.** Funds may be used for allowable costs incurred on or after March 13, 2020, and funds can be distributed through September 2023.

Funds can be used to:

- Provide professional development for staff on understanding the mental health impacts of COVID 19 as well as the impacts of social distancing on students
- Hire contracted staff to provide direct mental health counseling and other support services to students and school staff



- Contract with community mental health partners and agencies to provide assessment and evaluation services to determine mental health needs of students and their families
- Address non-academic issues that impact learning (such as anxiety, behavioral problems, drug abuse, and bullying) through counseling, telehealth, mentoring, suicide prevention, and therapeutic services and supports
- Provide professional development for staff on how to provide a tiered mental health support program for students
- Hire counseling staff or contract with community partners to implement tiered mental health supports and interventions for students
- Provide training and resources to parents, students, and community members on the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, abuse, and human trafficking

## ARP ESSER III

As part of the American Recovery Plan (ARP), Congress has allocated ESSER III funds for educational support for K-12 schools. Allowable uses are similar to those listed above for CARES/ESSER II funding. ESSER III funds can be distributed through 2024.

ESSER III includes one major change from ESSER II that can help districts obtain funds for mental health programs. The plan requires districts to allocate at least 20 percent of their funding under ESSER III to address learning loss, which has been a concerning outcome from the pandemic disruption. **The act specifically calls out the need for interventions to address social emotional learning.** Many states have taken this a step further and actually earmarked a portion of these funds that must be spent on mental health support.



## IDEA PART B

IDEA funds are used to help meet the needs of students with disabilities. Schools often use IDEA funding to cover the cost of placing students with emotional and behavioral problems in out-of-district therapeutic schools.

Adding in-district mental health support resources can reduce the need for these out-of-district placements. With clinical experts counseling students as well as working with their parents and teachers, students are able to stay in their public school and be successful there. Returning students to the district can free up quite a bit of your IDEA funding.

Here's what you might not know: you can use the same IDEA funds to pay for an in-district support program. Even if your IDEA funding has already been approved for the school year, you can file an Amendment to reallocate your funds.





## SEMI

The Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI) program provides funding to reimburse public school districts for a portion of the costs of school-based special education services.

Mental health support services, such as assessments and psychological counseling, are reimbursable expenses under SEMI. So, when you have a licensed school-based clinician counseling a typical caseload of students every week, a portion of that expense can be recovered through SEMI funding. That alone can add up to over \$5000 in qualifying reimbursable costs, not including reimbursement for other services the clinician provides (such as participation in IEP assessments).

**How to apply:** Most schools are already getting SEMI funds for IEP assessments, but there are additional claims you can make for mental health related services. You'll need to work with your district's SEMI coordinator to submit the documentation needed to claim reimbursement for these services.

## EXTRAORDINARY AID

Extraordinary Aid helps school districts cover the costs of supporting individual students who need a more intensive level of services from the district. That can include students with behavioral and emotional problems who need individual and small-setting support.

When the cost of that support exceeds a given threshold (approximately \$40,000 per year currently), the district can receive compensation through this fund. The thresholds are published by the state and may change each year.

You can include mental health services when calculating the costs of supporting individual students. Doing so can bring the total costs for one or more students above the threshold and allow your school to receive Extraordinary Aid funds for those students.



## TITLE I

Title I federal funds are intended to support schools with high concentrations of students from low-income families. For qualifying districts, these funds help to provide a high-quality education that will enable all children to meet the state academic performance standards.

Did you know that Title I funds can be used to pay for mental health support services? Here's why.

Research has shown that the trauma associated with financial adversity has an impact on student academic achievement. By implementing a consistent mental health support program, school districts can help students overcome the effects of trauma and improve their school performance. In fact, when schools implement mental health support programs, overall student achievement can increase dramatically.

Mental health services eligible for Title I funding include:

- 1 Counseling, school-based mental health programs, mentoring services, and other strategies to improve students' nonacademic skills
- 2 Positive behavior interventions and supports
- 3 Parent Involvement programs requirements are completed through the family counseling component of services

Consultants must be selected based on demonstrated competence, qualifications, and experience beyond those that may be rendered by school employees.

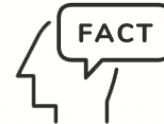


## MYTHS VS FACTS

### Myths And Facts



**Title I funds may be used only for instruction**



**Title I funds may be used for activities and strategies designed to raise achievement by:**

- \* Improving attendance
- \* Improving school climate,
- \* Counteracting bullying,
- \* Providing counseling, mentoring and school-based mental health programs
- \* Providing positive behavioral intervention and supports

### Myths And Facts



**IDEA and Title I funds are mutually exclusive, and you can't consolidate funds from both sources in a school-wide program.**



**A school-wide program may consolidate funds received under Title I and Part B of the IDEA. To ensure IDEA Part B, the program must comply with all other requirements of IDEA Part B.**



## TITLE IV

Title IV funding promotes 21st century community learning, authorizing a wide range of programs. One of the programs under Title IV is The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant (SSAE), designed to improve access to a well-rounded educational experience for all students. Public schools can take advantage of these grants to provide enriched curriculum including technology, arts, physical education, and health.

The SSAE program is also intended to improve conditions for student learning. Student mental health support programs can help to achieve this goal, because mental health conditions interfere with learning. When students receive the support they need, they are more likely to succeed academically and less likely to use drugs or engage in other dangerous behavior.

## TITLE V

Title V funding supports innovation and educational improvement while increasing academic achievement and the quality of education for all students. Programs that provide health services and community involvement can qualify for funding under Title V.

Here's how school-based mental health support services qualifies for Title V funds:

- It's an *innovative* program that improves the educational environment.
- It provides *health services* to students suffering from mental health issues.
- When the program includes training and family intervention, it meets the requirement for *community involvement*.



## ALLOCATING TITLE IV FUNDS

### School Allocation > \$30K

*Spend 20% on Well-rounded education:  
STEM, art, music, PE*

*Spend 20% on Safe Schools: Healthy students,  
violence prevention, increasing attendance,  
school counselors, mental health*

*Spend 60% on Technology or any combination of  
all three categories*

### School Allocation < \$30K

*Spend funds in at least one of the  
above categories*



# THE PROCESS FOR GETTING TITLE GRANTS

To pay for a school-wide mental health support program using Title I, IV, or V funds, you'll need to develop the following:

## **A comprehensive needs assessment.**

If your school is currently receiving some Title funds, you already have a needs assessment. If it includes safety or social and emotional learning, then you can use it to apply for funding for mental health support. However, you may find that your assessment addresses only attendance, grades, and discipline. In that case, you may need to work with your administrative team to revise your needs assessment to include mental health needs.

## **A comprehensive school-wide plan.**

Develop a plan to provide appropriate individualized mental health supports to students who are struggling due to mental health issues. This will include special education students with learning disabilities, but can also include general education students who have experienced trauma, or are struggling with behavioral and emotional issues such as school refusal.

## **An annual evaluation plan.**

Develop a plan to assess the success of your plan in meeting the needs of your students.

## **Not sure what a school-based mental health support program should look like?**

Here's a resource that can help. [Proactive Mental Wellness in School Districts](#)

## **Want to learn more about the funding process?**

In this [15-minute podcast](#), Pat Hovey and Chris Leonard discuss the process of uncovering the right funding opportunities and setting a plan in motion to obtain funds for student mental health support.



## NEED ADVICE? GET A FREE CONSULTATION

If you have never created a funding plan for student mental health support, it can be challenging to figure out which funding source(s) could work for your school.

## PAT HOVEY CAN HELP.

In case you don't already know Pat, as a seasoned Director of Special Services she successfully launched and obtained funding for student mental health programs in several New Jersey school districts. And, she has coached more than a dozen other districts through the process. Pat has more experience (and tricks up her sleeve) than anyone you could find.

Pat now serves as Executive Director for Thrive. We are happy to share her expertise to help more school districts overcome financial barriers to providing the mental health support students need.

**Contact Pat for a free consultation and to get personalized advice about how to work through your district's specific needs and challenges.**

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## ABOUT THRIVE

### Our Mission

At Thrive, we believe every student should have access to qualified mental health support within their home school district, leading to improved educational outcomes for students and lower costs for school districts.

### Our comprehensive student mental health & educational services

Thrive programs provide a comprehensive range of mental health services to support students struggling with mental health issues, and to help school staff better serve students and improve school culture.

Visit our [website](#) to learn more.



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