

# Students' Mental Health and Wellness: Barriers to Mental Health Service Provision

## THE NOTRE DAME MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SURVEY ALLIANCE FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

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In the fall of 2009, principals representing over 400 schools—across 12 dioceses—participated in the Alliance for Catholic Education's Mental Health and Wellness Survey.

The purpose of the study was to examine data from a national sample of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in order to shed light on patterns of mental health service provision, staffing, needs, and barriers (Frabutt et al., 2010). While Foster et al.'s (2005) groundbreaking work provided descriptive

insight regarding the landscape of mental health services in public schools, an environmental scan of such efforts in the private education sector—and Catholic schools in particular—has been lacking.

To complement an understanding of who is providing mental health services and what the presenting conditions and needs of students are, this fact sheet focuses on the barriers encountered during mental health service provision in Catholic elementary and high schools.

## *Barriers to Mental Health Service Provision...*

Schools were asked to assess the degree to which several factors were a barrier to providing mental health and wellness services to their students. Examples of barriers include: transportation difficulties, student confidentiality, stigma, inadequate school resources, competing priorities, gaining parental cooperation, and the like. The assessments were based on a scale ranging from 1-4, with 1 being not a barrier and 4 being a significant barrier (see Table 1).



Both elementary and secondary schools identified the same three barriers as most prominent. The greatest barrier, indicated by both elementary and secondary schools, centered on the financial constraints of families. The second and third most highly rated barriers were: a) school mental health resources are inadequate to meet student needs; and b) stigma associated with receiving mental health services. For each of these barriers, however, elementary schools rated the barrier as being more serious (i.e., higher mean values) than the secondary schools did.

## Barriers to Mental Health Service Provision...

At the other end of the continuum, the least serious barriers to providing mental health services in elementary schools were language and cultural barriers of students/families and protecting student confidentiality.

Secondary schools reported that lack of coordination/collaboration between school staff and community providers and protecting student confidentiality were among the least daunting barriers to mental health service



### References and Acknowledgment

Foster, S., Rollefson, M., Doksum, T., Noonan, D., & Robinson, G. (2005). *School mental health services in the United States, 2002-2003*. DHHS Pub. No. (SMA) 05-4068. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Frabutt, J. M., Clark, W., & Speech, G. (2010). *Social and emotional wellness in private schools*. Paper presented at the Advancing School Mental Health Conference, Albuquerque, NM.

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Table 1.

Barriers Encountered When Providing Mental Health Services

Barrier	Elementary		High	
	M (SD)	% Reporting Somewhat or Serious Barrier	M (SD)	% Reporting Somewhat or Serious Barrier
Financial constraints of families	2.71 (1.05)	57	2.27 (.97)	40
School mental health resources are inadequate to meet student needs	2.59 (1.16)	55	2.15 (1.18)	38
Stigma associated with student receiving mental health services	2.34 (1.43)	48	2.10 (.80)	25
Competing priorities take precedence over mental health services	2.42 (1.14)	49	1.83 (1.08)	27
Community mental health resources inadequate to meet student needs	2.09 (1.05)	33	1.77 (.89)	22
Transportation difficulties for students to travel to service providers	2.06 (1.11)	32	1.56 (.78)	10
Gaining parental cooperation and consent	1.98 (.86)	24	1.64 (.66)	10
Inadequate coordination/collaboration between school staff and community providers	1.98 (1.02)	28	1.48 (.73)	10
Language and cultural barriers of students or families	1.61 (.91)	17	1.52 (.92)	13
Protecting student confidentiality	1.44 (.77)	14	1.25 (.52)	4