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Students' Mental Health and Wellness: Patterns of Staffing in Catholic Schools

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.

This fact sheet focuses on the source of mental health staffing in Catholic schools and the amount and kind of various staff positions in Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

Source of Staffing...

Principals were asked to describe the administrative locus for the delivery and coordination of mental health services in their schools. The source of mental health staffing in nearly 4 out of 10 elementary schools is with a community provider (see Table 1). About one-quarter of staffing is school based, and one-fifth is diocesan (i.e., district) based. Catholic high schools, in contrast, reported a higher percentage of staffing at the school level (38%), and lower levels of both community based (22%) and diocesan based (8%) staffing. A small percentage of Catholic schools rely on mental health services provided by volunteers (5% elementary; 8% high).

Table 1. Source of Mental Health Staffing in Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools

	Elementary % (n = 308)	High % (n = 65)
Community Provider	39	22
School-based	24	38
Diocesan-based	19	8
Combinations	14	12
Volunteer	5	8

Mental Health Staff Positions...

To better understand the characteristics of mental health staff operating in Catholic schools, principals reported the number of staff employed in the following positions, including whether the staff were full- or part-time: school counselors, mental health counselors, school psychologists, clinical/Ph.D.-level psychologists, social workers, substance abuse counselors, and school nurses. Findings in Table 2 capture the percentage of schools that reported at least one full- or part-time staff member for each position.

At the elementary level, school nurses (43%), school counselors (35%), and school psychologists (28%) were the most common mental health service providers. All Catholic high schools reported having either a full- or part-time school counselor, 63% drew upon school nurses, and 35% had school psychologists. The percentage of Catholic elementary schools reporting full-time mental health staff, across all positions, was quite low, ranging from 0% to 13%. While 88% of Catholic high schools have access to a full-time school counselor, the percentage of schools reporting full-time staffing for other mental health providers was more attenuated, ranging from 0 to 30%. Full- or part-time volunteers constituted 8% and 12%, respectively, of Catholic elementary and high school mental health staffing.

Table 2. Percentage of Catholic Elementary and High Schools with Various Types of Staff who Provide Mental Health Services

Staff Positions	Elementary %		High %	
	Full or Part Time	Full Time	Full or Part Time	Full Time
School Nurses	43	13	63	30
School Counselor	35	11	100	88
School Psychologists	28	3	35	5
School Social Workers	17	1	15	14
Mental Health Counselors	8	2	22	12
Volunteers	8	1	12	2
Clinical/Counseling Psychologist (Ph.D.)	5	1	8	3
Other Staff Positions	4	1	18	5
Alcohol/Substance Abuse Counselors	4	0	21	9
Psychiatrists	1	0	2	0

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References and Acknowledgments

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