

The Mental Health in Schools Act would expand the availability of comprehensive school-based mental health services for students in communities across the country. Undoubtedly, healthier and safer students learn and perform better. A key component of academic success is addressing the mental health of our nation's children and adolescents.

Research has demonstrated that prevention and early intervention strategies strengthen children's and families' mental health and resiliency, prevent or lessen the burden of illness, and help with the recovery from trauma. According to a 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a mental health diagnosis first experience it by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24, but do not seek treatment, on average, until the age of 24. Given the early onset of emotional and behavioral disorders and their subsequent indirect and direct costs (estimated at \$247 billion annually), investments in early intervention programs, especially those that better connect behavioral health and education systems, should be prioritized.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, behavioral and emotional problems decreased among 31 percent of youth with mental health issues after 6 months of receiving mental health care. Within one year of entering a mental health program, the school attendance rates of youth and their grades increased significantly. In addition, the number of students involved in violent incidents decreased by 15 percent within three years after a school implemented a mental health program. Despite this, many students struggle to access the care they need.

This legislation would provide communities in my state with much needed assistance in developing policies to address child and adolescent mental health issues and violence when and if it occurs. It builds on the highly-effective Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, authorizes competitive grants to local school districts to assist them in early interventions and referrals for treatment, promotes positive support and education for students and their families, and provides for culturally and linguistically appropriate staff training. The effect of the Act will be to create a much more positive and safer environment for children with mental health and addiction challenges in our local communities.