

Executive Summary

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Recruitment and Retention of School Mental Health Providers: Strategies and Key Resources¹

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In recent years, governments at all levels have offered growing support to expand school mental health programs.¹ Unfortunately, many school districts in the U.S. are located in communities with a shortage of mental health clinicians.² School mental health programs often face challenges when recruiting and retaining school mental health providers.³ Further, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has strained school budgets and increased provider stress, creating additional barriers to sustaining and expanding the school mental health workforce.⁴

Schools, school districts, and community mental health agencies can leverage various strategies to improve the school mental health workforce recruitment and retention. To broaden awareness and facilitate the use of these strategies, we published [a report](#) that synthesizes these strategies based on a detailed review of publicly available resources and peer-reviewed research articles. The report also includes a guide to resources that can support the implementation of these strategies.

STRATEGIES

Organizational strategies refer to strategies that can be implemented by schools, school districts, and community mental health organizations to recruit and retain school mental health providers.

- ❖ Collection of Data to identify areas for improvement and develop a recruitment and retention plan.
- ❖ Recruitment Strategies
 - Proactively and strategically market the organization;
 - Identify prospective employees from the education pipeline and existing employees' referrals;
 - Combine resources with other organizations;
 - Strive for equitable and inclusive hiring processes to create a diverse school mental health workforce.

¹ Zhang, Y. X., Wilk, A. S., von Esenwein, S., & Cummings, J. R. (2020). *Recruitment and Retention of School Mental Health Providers: Strategies and Key Resources*. Atlanta, GA. Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Southeast MHTTC).

❖ Retention Strategies

- Conduct orientation and onboarding to help new providers transition into their positions;
- Support providers to develop professional competence and confidence;
- Actively monitor and support provider wellbeing;
- Continuously assess the workplace culture and adopt policies that promote equity and inclusion to retain a diverse school mental health workforce.

Policy Interventions are implemented by federal, state, and local governments to facilitate the development, recruitment, and retention of school mental health providers.

❖ Policies that Aim to Expand the Mental Health Workforce

- Collect data to monitor the mental health workforce and to inform policies;
- Fund training positions and loan repayment programs, and leverage visa waiver programs to expand the mental health workforce.

❖ Policies that Incentivize Schools and Mental Health Agencies to Invest in Developing the Mental Health Workforce

- Hold schools accountable for non-test-score measures (e.g., attendance and graduation rates) to motivate them to allocate resources to school mental health programs;
- Specify targets for developing the provider workforce when appropriating money for school mental health.

Please consult our [full report](#) to:

- Learn more about strategies for recruiting and retaining school mental health providers;
- Identify resources to guide the implementation of these strategies, including resources developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Center for School Mental Health, and the National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network.

References

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2. Thomas K, Ellis A, Konrad T, Holzer C, Morrissey J. County-Level Estimates of Mental Health Professional Shortage in the United States. *Psychiatric Services*. 2009;60(10):1323-1328.
3. Jacobson L. With Growing Calls for More Mental Health Services, States Tackle School Counselor Caseloads. 2019; <https://www.educationdive.com/news/with-growing-calls-for-more-mental-health-services-states-tackle-school-co/556169/>. Accessed March 4, 2020.
4. Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center. Recruitment and Retention of School Mental Health Providers Part 2: Innovative Strategies. 2020; <https://mhhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhhttc/product/recruitment-and-retention-school-mental-health-providers-part-2>. Accessed March 1, 2021.