



Recommendation for School-Based Mental Health Literacy to Increase Workforce Readiness and School Safety

Dear Indiana Policymakers and Invested Stakeholders,

Mental health literacy is the knowledge, understanding, and skills that help us become responsible, effective, and successful in living full and healthy lives. With good mental health literacy, we learn how to take better care of ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities. **Schools and early childcare providers play a vital role in creating spaces where students can learn and practice healthy coping techniques and foster a positive sense of self.** Historically, the prioritization of mental health literacy has not been a central purpose of schooling and the allocation of resources has been limited. Mental health literacy can decrease the need found within Indiana's overburdened mental health system and schools have a responsibility to create safe, healthy, and affirming environments that can prevent violence in our communities and develop a productive workforce.

Mental health literacy has been shown to promote healthy behaviors, self-care strategies, and ways to connect with others and support those in need. Evidence shows that mental health literacy improves help-seeking efficacy and decreases the time between onset of symptoms and access to getting help. Indiana is ranked 26th in the nation based on the prevalence of mental illness among youth and rates of access to care by Mental Health America. In 2021, 82 of Indiana's 92 counties did not have enough mental health care providers to meet the demand for services, and according to the National Survey of Children's Health, 52.4% of Indiana children with a mental health or behavioral health condition did not receive treatment or counseling. **These statistics demonstrate the complexities of improving access to mental health services and the need to support promotion of positive mental health for all Hoosier youth and prevent adverse mental health outcomes.**


Research has demonstrated an array of positive outcomes when schools integrate mental health literacy within all schools. Most notable are those that bridge the gap between K-12 educational settings and post-secondary and workforce readiness and success. A recent America Succeeds study found that 7 out of 10 most requested skills in job postings are durable skills like communication, critical thinking, and collaboration, and that these skills are sought nearly four times more frequently than the top five technical or hard skills. These skills are core elements of mental health literacy and must be prioritized within Indiana's educational settings so that our youth are successful in entering and advancing within a variety of post-secondary pathways.

Mental health literacy has also proven to have positive effects on school safety and promotion of supportive school environments. Students are less apt to engage in violence when they have self-awareness, the ability to regulate their emotions, and an understanding of the effects of stress and trauma. **When youth understand how to take a deep breath in moments of conflict and can**

practice self-awareness and critical thinking, they are more inclined to avoid violence and decrease incidence of exclusionary discipline practices by the school system.

Increasing Indiana's mental health literacy complements the Behavioral Health Commission's recommendations to improve access to mental health treatment services. **Therefore, it is our recommendation to build policy that funds and incentivizes schools and early childcare providers to implement mental health literacy in order to increase school safety and improve the skills and mindsets needed for the next generation to be contributing members of Indiana's workforce.**

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. NIELSEN
SHERIFF OF BOONE COUNTY INDIANA

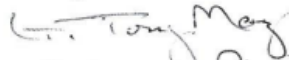
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Sheriff of Boone County Indiana



Jennifer Pferrer
Wellness Council of Indiana
Indiana Chamber of Commerce



Marcia Haaff
President & CEO
The Lutheran Foundation, Inc.



F. Wayne Police Department
F. Wayne Indiana.

Lt Tony Maze
Fort Wayne Police Department
Fort Wayne, Indiana



Chase Lyday
Chief of Police
Avon School Police Department



Brianna Morse
Director of Youth Initiatives
Indiana Department of Workforce Development