



A Collaborative Approach to Enhance Student Mental Health

At NJAAP, we recognize that mental health is an essential component of overall student well-being, yet the CDC's 2023 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) revealed stark findings indicating that nearly 40% of U.S. students in grades 9-12 experience persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Nearly 1 in 10 students surveyed reported having experienced a suicide attempt.



This is why we launched a statewide virtual learning collaborative aimed at enhancing student mental and behavioral health, with generous support from the [New Jersey Department of Children and Families](#) (NJDCF). The Growing Healthy Minds program, now in its second year, is designed for school teams across New Jersey supporting K-12 students and seeks to engage participants from all 21 counties.

To date, more than 450 school staff members — including school physicians, administrators, counselors, teachers, social workers, and school-based mental health professionals — have participated in the seven-session series, which will run through May 2025. Participants are gaining valuable insights and strategies to better support students who may be struggling with mental health challenges, while also fostering an environment that prioritizes emotional wellness and resilience.

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Topics addressed throughout the series range from taking a team-based approach to supporting student mental health, to strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism and school refusal, and more. The series is led by a diverse and interdisciplinary team of experienced hub faculty, consisting of pediatricians with expertise as a school physician and in adolescent health, school legal counsel, a school administrator, school nurse, and school counselor.



Growing Healthy Minds Hub Faculty represent diverse professional backgrounds and geographic reach throughout the state.

This initiative serves as a critical resource for school teams to enhance their ability to identify and address mental health issues early on, creating a supportive and proactive school environment for every child. It is designed as a complement to

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NJ4S, the [New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services Network](#), which launched in the 2023-2024 school year. This statewide, innovative hub-and-spoke model consists of [15 regional hubs](#) that provide prevention and brief intervention services to New Jersey public school students, parents/caretakers, and school faculty.

"As a High School Principal in today's landscape it has become increasingly important to collaborate and draw from the expertise of educational, mental health, and medical specialists to best support our student population," noted Kristina Donovan, PHD, Principal of Highland Park High School. "We are fortunate to have resources that tie together these key personnel and ensure the best outcomes for our students."

NJAAP looks forward to continuing to grow this collaborative effort and supporting lasting positive impacts on students and staff across New Jersey.

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