

# Policy Brief: Expanding School-Based Mental Health Access Through The Student Therapy Access Project (STAP)

## Executive Summary

The Student Therapy Access Project (STAP) is a nonprofit initiative dedicated to removing financial, structural, and cultural barriers that prevent students from receiving timely mental health care. Founded by **Jackson Seling**, who created STAP after experiencing his own challenges with mental health, the organization works to ensure that every young person—regardless of income or circumstance—can access high-quality therapy while in school.

This policy brief outlines the current crisis in youth mental health, explains STAP's model for increasing access to care, and proposes legislative pathways for bringing sustainable, school-based therapy funding and support to all students.

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## The Problem: A Growing Youth Mental Health Emergency

- **1 in 5 students** meets the criteria for a mental health disorder, yet **over half receive no treatment**.
- Schools are the **largest provider** of mental health services for youth, yet **most schools lack adequate staffing**, funding, or accessible referral pathways.
- Barriers include:
  - Long waitlists for community services
  - High out-of-pocket costs
  - Limited insurance coverage

- Transportation challenges
- Cultural stigma
- These barriers lead to declining academic performance, reduced graduation rates, increased behavioral crises, and long-term economic costs to communities.

Youth need **low-barrier, school-based, and fully funded therapy access now.**

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## **STAP's Solution: School-Based Therapy Access for All Students**

STAP partners with school districts to provide **on-site or virtual therapy** through licensed mental health professionals at **no cost to students.**

### **Key Components of the STAP Model**

- **Free therapy services** delivered during the school day
- Partnerships with **local therapists and telehealth providers**
- **Confidential, stigma-reducing** support structures
- Integration with existing school counseling and wellness teams
- Data-driven evaluation of outcomes
- Trauma-informed, culturally competent practices

STAP's model is designed to be cost-effective, scalable, and supportive of school staff, not burdensome.

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# Why Legislation Is Needed

While philanthropic support and district-level partnerships are essential, **state-level legislation** can ensure:

- **Sustainable, recurring funding** for school-based therapy
- **Expanded reimbursement** for mental health services
- **Removal of administrative barriers** that prevent schools from contracting with outside therapists
- **Standardized mental health access requirements** across districts
- **Support for rural and underfunded communities** that lack local providers
- **Equity-focused care** that ensures all students receive support, not only those who can afford it

Without legislative action, access will remain inconsistent and inequitable.

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## Policy Recommendations

### 1. Establish a Statewide School-Based Therapy Funding Program

Provide recurring appropriations allowing districts to contract with licensed mental health professionals or approved nonprofit partners like STAP.

### 2. Expand Medicaid Reimbursement for On-Campus Services

Permit reimbursement for therapy delivered in schools through:

- Telehealth
- Individual and group counseling
- Preventative mental health services

### **3. Allow Districts to Partner with Third-Party Mental Health Organizations**

Ensure that nonprofits and community therapists can legally and efficiently provide services through contracts with schools.

### **4. Implement Minimum Access Standards**

Require schools to offer:

- A defined ratio of mental health providers to students
- Confidential counseling spaces
- Clear referral pathways
- Annual reporting on mental health service accessibility

### **5. Create Incentives for Workforce Expansion**

Support training, scholarships, and loan forgiveness for therapists working in school settings.

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## **Projected Impacts of STAP-Backed Legislation**

- Increased therapy access for thousands of students
- Reduced academic disruptions caused by untreated mental health conditions
- Lower rates of juvenile justice involvement
- Improved graduation rates and school attendance
- Cost savings for state healthcare and education systems
- Stronger communities and healthier families

Investing in school-based mental health support is **one of the highest-return, lowest-cost interventions available.**

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# About The Student Therapy Access Project (STAP)

Founded by **Jackson Seling**, STAP exists because many students—like Jackson once did—face overwhelming barriers when trying to get help. STAP's mission is to ensure that every student has the chance to thrive, heal, and succeed, regardless of income, circumstance, or stigma.

We work with schools, legislators, and mental health professionals to build a future where therapy is as accessible as the classroom itself.


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## Contact

For legislative partnerships, policy inquiries, or collaboration opportunities:

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