Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Educators' Top Concerns About Youth Mental Health: A Multimethod Brief Report

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K-12 schools are well positioned to address rising mental health challenges among youth, and school and district staff (i.e., "educators") have important perspectives about youth mental health. There is a need for research to identify educators' specific areas of concern about youth mental health, particularly in the postpandemic context. The present study aimed to (a) identify the domains of student mental health that educators perceive as their top concerns and (b) describe how educators characterize their concerns within these domains. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected as part of a needs assessment regarding Tier I (universal prevention) and Tier II (targeted intervention) programming across the 48 public school districts within three counties in southeastern Pennsylvania eligible for a broader school mental health research initiative in these counties. First, 34 school district administrators completed a survey regarding their top priorities for student mental health within their district. Then, 39 district administrators and school staff (i.e., principals, teachers, student services staff) participated in semistructured interviews. We examined quantitative data descriptively and performed a conventional content analysis on qualitative data. Across both quantitative and qualitative results, educators identified anxiety as a top concern. Within this category, interviewees discussed anxiety related to the social and academic pressures of the school environment, performance anxiety, and perfectionism. Additionally, disruptive behavior, dysregulation, peer relationships, and trauma were also identified as top concerns. These results have implications for the selection and prioritization of mental health prevention and intervention programs.

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