Overview of Study

Through funding from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a cross-disciplinary team of researchers from the University of South Florida conducted a study of the implementation of programs implemented through the Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Act of 2018 (H.R. 4909). A total of 128 grantees across the U.S. were awarded funding through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in 2018 and 2019 to improve school safety by implementing STOP programs in the Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training category.
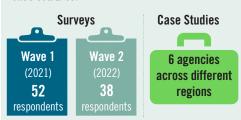
Grantees included:

- State and county education departments
- School districts
- Law enforcement agencies
- Non-profit organizations
- Independent consultants

The aims for this study were to understand:

- How implementation was carried out
- What types of components met different needs of school communities
- What kind of capacity agencies had to support mental health
- What the perceived barriers and facilitators of implementation were
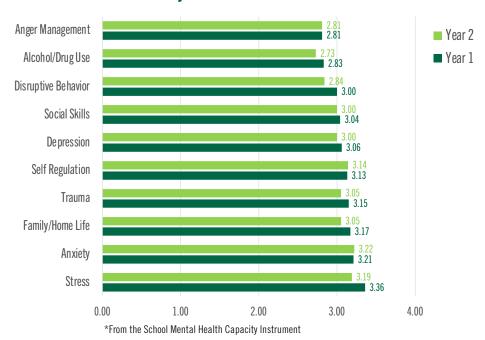- What led to better satisfaction with implementation

A mixed-method study was used to understand implementation capacity, barriers, and facilitators at a broad level through a cross-site survey as well as a locally contextualized level through case studies.

Surveys

Wave 1 (2021)
52 respondents

Wave 2 (2022)
38 respondents

Case Studies

6 agencies across different regions

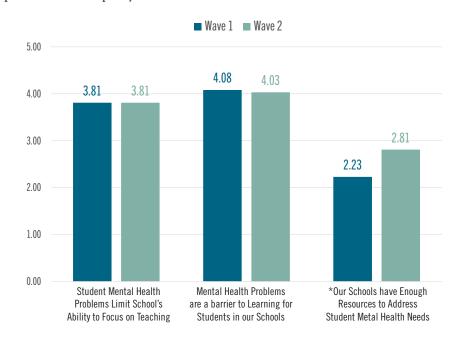## Mental Health Problems in Schools

Agencies reported high levels of mental health problems in schools, with each condition ranging from a Moderate Problem to a Very Big Problem.

Severity of Mental Health Problems in Schools

	Year 2	Year 1
Anger Management	2.81	2.81
Alcohol/Drug Use	2.73	2.83
Disruptive Behavior	2.84	3.00
Social Skills	3.00	3.04
Depression	3.00	3.06
Self Regulation	3.14	3.13
Trauma	3.05	3.15
Family/Home Life	3.05	3.17
Anxiety	3.22	3.21
Stress	3.19	3.36

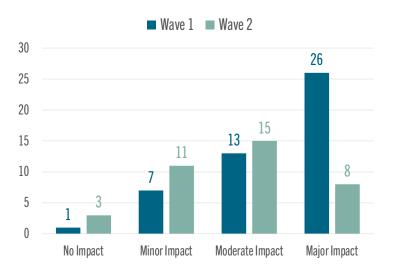*From the School Mental Health Capacity Instrument

School Mental Health Capacity

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that student mental health problems limited schools' ability to focus on teaching and that mental health problems were a barrier to learning. The majority of agencies disagreed that their schools had enough resources to address student mental health needs. However, there was a statistically significant increase in Wave 2 of those who agreed with this statement, which may show that the STOP grants helped to increase capacity over time to address student mental health needs.

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Student Mental Health Problems Limit School's Ability to Focus on Teaching	3.81	3.81
Mental Health Problems are a barrier to Learning for Students in our Schools	4.08	4.03
*Our Schools have Enough Resources to Address Student Metal Health Needs	2.23	2.81

COVID-19 Impact

■ Wave 1 ■ Wave 2

Because these STOP grant funding years we assessed coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an obvious impact to program implementation given that schools were especially affected during the pandemic. Most respondents from the first wave of the survey said that COVID had a major impact on their implementation efforts, while this number dropped substantially by the second wave, though many still reported a minor or moderate impact from the pandemic. This highlights the importance of having mitigation strategies in place for emergencies or disasters that disrupt federally funded, large scale initiatives, and for allowing grantees' flexibility in meeting their goals and potentially needing project extensions.

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The full report and more information can be found at

https://www.usf.edu/cbcs/cfs/cfbh/usf-school-safety-study.aspx

Implementation Capacity

Results also showed that those with higher responses to school mental health capacity questions also had higher responses to implementation capacity questions. This is important for ongoing efforts to implement violence prevention programs and mental health training, as it shows that capacity to address mental health problems and implementation readiness are associated with each other.

Factors that Led to Effective Implementation

■ Increasing collaborations between official departments, law enforcement, community agencies, and research partners

■ Establishing memberships with professional associations (e.g., Association of Threat Assessment Professionals; workgroup through National School Safety Alliance)

■ Having administrative buy-in

■ Partnering with other STOP grantees (e.g., offering YMHFA from one grant to crisis line and threat assessment teams from another)

■ Additional capacity, support, and funding at federal and states levels

■ Ensuring mechanisms for students to have safe staff member to reach out to

■ Using other funding streams to complement STOP-funded programs and training

■ Having informational resources for evidence-based programs

■ Utilizing virtual platforms and new technologies to increase capacity for training and family outreach

■ Engaging in technical assistance from National Center for School Safety

■ Conducting annual progress reviews

■ Having well-trained staff

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