STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

With over a half a million students in public schools, the burden of psychological and emotional turmoil likely affects more than 120,000 Connecticut students! For many years, research performed on behalf of the federal government has shown that the percentage of Americans who would benefit from mental health services is approximately 20% - or one-fifth of our population - *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2010 data.* Despite the differences in stressors and skills, this data holds even for school aged children. Schools have long been among the first to identify and provide supports to youngsters experiencing developmental, emotional or psychiatric issues (*A 1999 Surgeon General report on mental health describes schools as the primary setting for the identification of mental disorders in children and youth*). Recent evidence compiled by the World Health Organization indicates that by the year 2020, childhood neuropsychiatric disorders will rise proportionately by over 50 percent, to become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality, and disability among children.

While Connecticut school staff are highly trained and committed members of their local communities and are often the first line in identifying developing mental health problems among children, the capacity of schools to provide the needed services are compromised by issues such as:

Scheduling, as it impacts

- Providing uninterrupted and regularly scheduled appointments with students
- Accommodating parents schedules within the school day, or
- Meeting collaboratively with community service providers

Funding

- While special education services can be reimbursed through Federal Title XIX, services for general education students cannot be;
- There is no federal funding to provide mental health services in schools, outside of competitive and short-term grants or school based health centers; and
- Schools are often faced with the choice funding a teaching position or the position of a school mental health professional.

Consequently, school staff heavily relies upon the local child guidance clinics, family services clinics and other public/private facilities.

As social service agencies and school personnel in Connecticut continue to improve the development and delivery of mental health services to children, schools and their local community providers will need to create and improve their inter-agency collaboration ensuring that students are receiving timely intervention that may contribute to reducing future risks and problems for them. The Connecticut State Department of Education has made wraparound services in schools, especially in low-performing schools, an important part of our turnaround work, and is pleased to be included in these important collaborations affecting the future of our state's children.

- Scott Newgass, Education Consultant