



U.S. House of Representatives Reintroduces Bipartisan Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 16, 2023)- Representatives Kathy Manning (D-NC-06) and David Valadao (R-CA-21) reintroduced the Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act ([H.R. 3331](#)) in the U.S. House of Representatives. Currently, K-12 local school wellness policies guide a school district’s efforts to support schools’ nutrition and physical activity environment. The Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act would integrate mental health promotion and education, including eating disorders, within these existing policies.

Too often, education is focused on physical health without considering individuals’ mental health. Additionally, eating disorders are often overlooked as a serious mental health concern. It is critical that mental health is addressed in schools and this legislation represents an advancement of those efforts. As the nation continues to experience a youth mental health crisis, education and additional support for mental health is needed more than ever.

One in six youth experience a mental health disorder each year¹ and 2.3 million youth are coping with severe major depression. ^[06] In the United States, \$247 billion is spent each year on pediatric mental health treatment.² Integrating mental health education into school wellness policies will create cost-effective prevention and early intervention to ensure student wellness. Research has demonstrated that including comprehensive mental health programs within schools help students’ academic achievement and build upon core social skills, leadership, self-awareness, and caring connections to other individuals in their school and communities.³

“Students across the nation are grappling with the repercussions of the pandemic and increased pressures from social media,” said **Congresswoman Kathy Manning**. “Congress must act urgently to address the mental health needs of students. I’m proud to reintroduce my bipartisan bill to integrate mental health education and services into existing school wellness policies.”

¹ Whitney DG, Peterson MD. US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019;173(4):389– 391. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.5399.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, April 19). Child mental health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/child-mental-health.html>.

³ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schelling, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of student-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.

“Pandemic school closures caused an alarming rise in mental health issues for young people, and as a father of three these trends are a big concern to me,” **said Congressman Valadao**. “Incorporating mental health education into existing school wellness programs will help to create a comprehensive approach to what our students are already learning about healthy wellness habits. This bipartisan bill ensures Central Valley schools have the tools they need to educate students about the importance of maintaining their mental and physical health so they can lead happy, fulfilling lives.”

“The EDC is thrilled to work with Representatives Manning and Valadao on the Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act, **said EDC Board President, Christine Peat, PhD, FAED, LP**. “This important initiative represents a critical improvement in the ability to address eating disorders (and global mental health concerns) in a proactive and preventive fashion among our nation’s vulnerable youth. Including mental health in local school wellness policies ensures that we are supporting all aspects of a student’s wellbeing and, in doing so, better equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive.”

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders, and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can be found at: <https://eatingdisorderscoalition.org/>.

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