

# Advanced Practice Nurses: A Cost-Efficient Solution for School-Based Mental Health Services

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July 10th & 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024—A Workshop

Addressing Workforce Challenges Across the Behavioral Health Continuum of Care  
National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine  
Washington, DC



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# Faculty Disclosures

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- The presenter has no commercial support to disclose
- Presenter receives honoraria as member of Speakers' Bureau  
Otsuka (Rexulti for Schizophrenia & Adjunctive Treatment of MDD)
- Presenter receives royalties from American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc. related to the sale of her text  
*Manual of Clinical Psychopharmacology for Nurses* (2013)



# The Issues (CDC, 2021)

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- 50% of ALL lifetime mental illness begins by age 14
- 1 in 6 children ages 6 to 17 experiences a mental health disorder
- 1 in 5 seriously considered attempting suicide
- 1 in 10 made a suicide attempt
- Stressors Impacting Our Youth
  - Social Media Influences
  - Bullying & Violence
  - Societal Issues
  - Post-Pandemic Academic Delays
- Less than 20% of youth receive psychiatric treatment
  - Of those needing treatment 70% obtain in school setting
  - Only 42% of public schools offer mental health treatment





# The Context

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## *The Public School Setting*

- 3,200 students from pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- 38 students in Autism Programs
- 24 students in Behavioral Disabilities Program
- Psychiatric Diagnoses:
  - Severe Depression
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder
  - Anxiety, Social Anxiety, OCD
  - Severe ADHD
  - Oppositional Defiant & Conduct Disorders

## *The Psychiatric Advanced Practice Nurse*

- Consultant to the SCHOOL
- Biweekly Schedule 6.5 hour/day
- Psychiatric Evaluations
- Crisis Evaluations
- Psychotropic Medication Management (if indicated)
- Referrals for Community Based MH Care
- Referrals for Additional Diagnostic & Medical Care
- Recommendations for higher levels of care



# The Referral Question

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*Do the student's symptoms/behaviors  
impact their ability to learn within the  
educational environment?*



Image Leahy, 2009



# The Results

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- School Budgets +/- \$40,000 for Psychiatric APN Services
- Approximately 60 Unique Psychiatric Evaluations per year (since ~1995)
- Approximately 300 Medication Management Appointments (since 2022)
- Overall improved academic performance as well as “peaceful functioning at home”
- **Maintained 25 students in-district**
  - **Saving District \$1,700,000 !!!**
  - (Each out of district placement costs avg \$68,000)
- **Reduced staff injuries**
  - from **1 per day** to **6 per YEAR**



# The Challenges

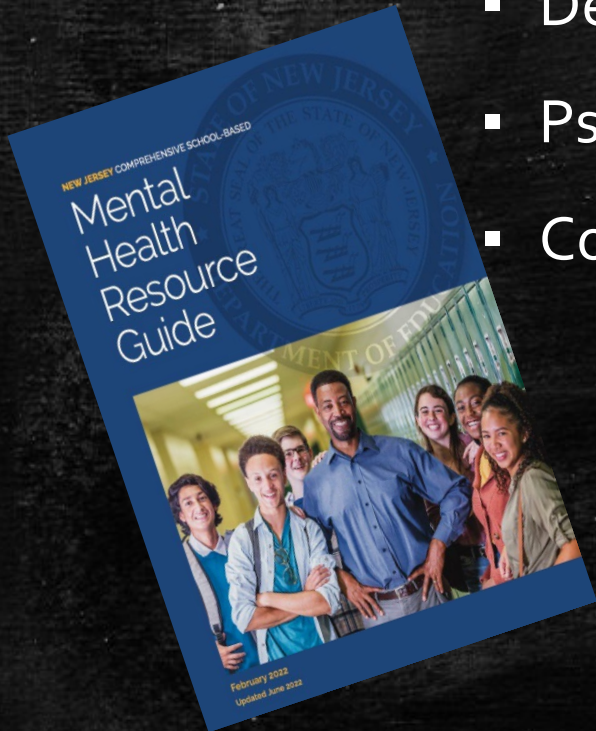
- Securing Sustainable Funding
  - Began as grant now built into budget
- School Resources
  - Mental health counselors
  - Behavioral analysts
- Specialized Programs
  - Autism programs
  - Behavioral disabilities programs
- Community Resources
  - Hospitals, Partial & Intensive Outpatient Programs
  - Residential Programs
  - Outpatient Treatment Providers (Therapists & Medication Management Providers)





# Implications for Policy

- CDC promoting Mental Health & Well-Being in Schools
- Many States Legislating Mental Health Screening in Schools
- Developing Budget: Viewing Cost Savings as ++ ROI
- Psychiatric APNs Educating Schools on Services
- Connecting with Directors of Special Education





## A Solution

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- *Psychiatric Advanced Practice Nurses are uniquely trained to evaluate and treatment acute & chronic mental health disorders which impact a child's academic functioning*
- *Psychiatric Advanced Practice Nurses provide a cost-efficient solution to the behavioral health workforce challenges faced by our public-school systems*



Thank You !!

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??? Questions ???