

Colton Slyder; School Funding - Mental Health

Good morning, esteemed members of the House, Senate, and everyone gathered here concerned about the current status of school funding. My name is CJ Slyder, a junior from Belmont High School - A Dayton Public School. I'm here to address a critical issue that impacts the well-being of our students and the effect that the lack of funding will have on mental health services in our K-12 schools.

Lawmakers, in recent years, there has been a troubling trend of budget cuts in the education sector that disproportionately affect essential support services like mental health professionals and school nurses. These cuts have significant implications for student well-being and the overall health of the school environment. As of right now, our current Mental Health advisors who are licensed through Children's Hospital will not have a job at Belmont High School next year due to lack of funding. These essential people do not just provide much-needed counseling, but they also help put out the daily fires that can happen on a moment's notice.

Ladies and gentlemen, without funding, schools will have to get rid of services that not only teach self-regulation, but also help calm down students who get upset. According to Dayton Daily News, DeWine is committed to expanding mental health services for youth by allocating \$51 million in a program to provide those services to all of the state's youth. But how will this really help in a moment's notice? Well, in short it won't. The mobile response and stabilization services will provide Montgomery and Preble county services led by Choices Coordinated Care Solutions, and given a budget of \$1.8 million. Now while that may seem like a lot of money, well DPS budgets 2.5 million annually for psychological services alone. This does not include the positive school climate personnel or the success coaches who help with chronic absenteeism and addressing issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are prevalent among high school students.

Everywhere we look in DPS, we see needs not being met. Lawmakers, by decreasing the funding, we are putting the burden on teachers. To not just be teachers, but caregivers, emergency nurses, counselors, as well as advocates, and sometimes parents. While the remaining mental health professionals are facing unsustainable workloads, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness. This situation can further diminish the quality of care provided to students. The lack of proper support services can contribute to a negative school climate. Students who do not receive the necessary support may struggle with social interactions, leading to issues such as bullying or social isolation. Investing in these services can reduce long-term costs associated with untreated mental and physical health issues, which often require more extensive intervention later.

According to the Dayton Daily News "Dayton Public Schools, ended fiscal year 2024 with nearly \$139.2 million cash on hand, equivalent to roughly 58.2% of its budget, according to the LSC. The district would have to lower that amount by more than \$67 million under the budget proposal." Based on this, the Dayton School Board treasurer Hiwot Abraha acknowledges that DPS would have to be put on the ballot more often to maintain funds. This reduction in funding is not only a concern for students but also raises concerns for teachers. Will they have a job next year? Be encouraged to retire early? Now why is this an issue? Well, looking at the new teacher salary of \$48 thousand compared to the average salary of \$66 thousand, the school can save money. This has a high impact

because DPS spends \$56.8 million on teachers salaries alone and they are already facing teacher shortages.

Since Governor DeWine himself notices the need for increased mental health services for today's youth. The bottom line is: without adequate mental health support, students may experience heightened stress and anxiety. This can lead to a decline in academic performance, increased absenteeism, and in severe cases, mental health crises that go unmanaged. All while the state of Ohio is asking schools to reduce their budget. Lawmakers, you must see that the potential defunding will cause more harm than good.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter.