Increase resources supporting a comprehensive school behavioral health system

Recommendations:

- Schools, school leadership, and school districts should continue to support increased behavioral health services.

- Strengthen school cultures through:
  - a. Consistently enforcing anti-bullying policies and emphasize anti-bullying messages.
  - b. Training students and staff to prevent harm, such as with bystander intervention.
  - c. Strengthen utilizing and promoting inclusive language and behavior.
  - d. Trauma-informed approaches, such as signs of trauma and how to take action.
  - e. Continue and increase peer support programs.

- Re-examine policies to ensure that policies are restorative to help youth address their behavioral health disorders in an institution and community that support the ongoing process of treatment and recovery.

- Increase behavioral health personnel, messaging, and targeted staff training.

- Provide increased supports for staff and teacher mental health to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue.

- Regularly conduct mental health screenings of students. Ensuring regular screenings of students decreases the chances of youth slipping through the cracks.

- Connect students with behavioral health services.

- Increase student behavioral health education and skills.

- Create a workforce of youth-focused liaisons. As youth experience increased behavioral health needs, educators are not always equipped to provide wraparound support. Building a workforce of "school liaisons" can help support youth and caregivers as they connect to appropriate services.

Image credit: Maskot/Maskot/GettyImages

Why:

- Focus group participants discussed that learning about behavioral health and emotional wellbeing skills should happen earlier. This is further supported by school staff discussing that they are seeing behavioral health concerns at an earlier age.

- Youth highlighted the need for increased tools and training to address substance use within schools.

- Students across Larimer County are not able to consistently access behavioral health care during school hours.

- Teacher burnout impacts youth behavioral health.

- Policies and practices around attendance or behavioral challenges can present increased barriers to youth accessing the support that may only be available to them within the schools.

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- School counselors and school staff have made significant efforts to normalize conversations about mental health by including it in curriculum/programming and events with parents.
- Focus group youth participants highlighted having trusted teachers and staff in school that they could talk to.
- Participants discussed that superintendent's involvement in behavioral health discussions and that their support and participation were important to addressing behavioral health needs.

> I feel like utilizing a school counselor or anything like that was mainly just for people who already knew that there was a use for it, or if there was an issue prevalent, not necessarily something that you could just go up and talk to as an available source - it was really just something that was kinda viewed as only if you needed it or only if you already knew that you needed it to be able to utilize it. Not necessarily just understanding and sure, that it's available for anybody. Because that was really my experience in school - was just, not necessarily knowing it's there for the benefit of everybody.
>
> ~ Focus group youth

> The way I got help is I had a teacher I was really close with, and I told him about my situation and he helped me meet with the counselor at [school] and they set me up with a therapist and I didn't have to pay, it was through the school, and I also got to keep it a secret from my parents for a while until I was ready to tell her, so that helped a lot.
>
> ~ Focus group youth

> Not everyone's going to ask for help, so like the counselors meeting the kids for 5 minutes would help them a lot because some of them just don't ask for help because they're scared or like they don't think it's a big deal, and it would just be better overall for everyone.
>
> ~ Focus group youth

> So I feel like we start these things even in the most simple form so that kids can understand as young as possible, even if it's just in the school system, if they don't have that at home, I feel like that's going to do amazing things as far as later on turning to different support systems.
>
> ~ Focus group youth

Contact CIT@healthdistrict.org for more information.

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