

Minnesota Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

March 3rd, 2024

Dear Senator Steve Cwodzinski and Representative Laurie Pryor,

I am writing to express the strong support of the Minnesota Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (MSCAP) for the implementation of developmentally appropriate mental health and substance use disorder educational curriculum for K-12 students in our state.

Children and adolescents today are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. The pressures of academic achievement, social media, peer relationships, and family dynamics can all contribute to the development of mental health issues at a young age. Furthermore, substance use disorders continue to pose a significant threat to the health and well-being of our youth, with many individuals turning to substances as a means of coping with their mental health struggles.

Child development research shows that in kindergarten, children can learn basic concepts related to emotions, stress management, and healthy coping strategies. As students' progress through elementary school, they can build upon these foundational skills and explore topics such as empathy, self-esteem, and conflict resolution. In middle school, students can delve deeper into mental health issues, including the signs and symptoms of common disorders such as anxiety and depression, as well as the risks associated with substance use. Finally, in high school, students can receive comprehensive education about mental health and substance use disorders, including information about treatment options, stigma reduction, and resources for support.

By integrating mental health and substance use disorder education into the K-12 curriculum, we can help reduce the stigma surrounding these issues and promote a culture of openness, empathy, and support within our schools and communities. Furthermore, we can empower students to recognize when they or their peers may be struggling and how and when to seek help when needed, thereby preventing the escalation of mental health and substance use problems.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to seeing your leadership and support in addressing the child mental health crisis in our state.

Sincerely,



Israel Sokeye, MD

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist.

President, Minnesota Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry