

# How Teletherapy Offers an Affordable, Sustainable and Adaptable Mental Health Solution for Schools

District leaders across the country know that this school year is different from any before. School districts have recognized the increased and urgent need to provide mental health support as students transition back to learning in person. After a year and a half of economic hardship, isolation, and tremendous loss, schools recognize the need to expand upon the mental health resources that were available to students before the pandemic.



The good news: many districts have the funds to address this crisis, having received federal stimulus funds to support a safe return to school. However, the question remains - **what are the highest value mental health care options for schools that will maximize the number of students reached, stretch funding dollars, and continue to be financially sustainable after the recovery aid period ends?**

**Figure A: Costs to Hire Additional Mental Health Counselors**

State	District Size	Proposed Total Mental Health Budget	Investment
FL	350,000 students	\$13 million	128 new hires, including 100 part time mental health professionals, plus mental health coordinators and program administrators
IL	341,000 students	\$17 million	78 new school nurses, 44 new social workers and 51 new special education case managers
AZ	1,151,000 students	\$21.3 million	140 new counselors and social workers



**Figure A** shows the proposed mental health budgets for the 2021-2022 school year in three different large districts, all funded by pandemic recovery aid. While access to mental health care is critical, it is clear that hiring school-based behavioral health staff is extremely costly. In addition, even when funding is available, districts still face the challenge of finding enough high-quality, licensed clinicians to fill the proposed roles due to a nationwide shortage of mental health care providers. It can also be hard to predict just how many students will need counseling services this year with the unprecedented impact of the pandemic.

New digital healthcare innovations offer a solution that districts can implement either as a supplemental or standalone program to reduce overall costs while addressing the concurrent challenges of reaching all students in need and finding additional counseling staff to hire.

**As the nation's largest provider of telehealth services to K-12 schools, Hazel Health can connect students with licensed clinicians for live teletherapy sessions through HIPAA and FERPA compliant technology, at a fraction of the cost of on-site providers.** Hazel also provides case managers to facilitate treatment plans, oversees training and onboarding of providers, and offers physical health/urgent care to all enrolled students.

**Figure B** demonstrates the cost breakdown for the same three districts if they were to partner with Hazel Health. In all three cases, these districts now have full access to Hazel, guaranteeing that every single student could receive counseling services, while they also still have millions of dollars remaining from their proposed mental health budgets. These funds can still be used to hire full-time school based counseling staff, or reallocated for other needs.

### **Figure B: District Costs to Integrate Hazel Health with Full-Time Counselors**

<b>State</b>	<b>District Size</b>	<b>Proposed Total Mental Health Budget</b>	<b>Cost to Provide Hazel Health</b>	<b>Remaining Funds</b>
<b>FL</b>	350,000 students	\$13 million	\$3.5 million	\$9.5 million
<b>IL</b>	341,000 students	\$17 million	\$3.4 million	\$13.6 million
<b>AZ</b>	1,151,000 students	\$21.3 million	\$7.5 million	\$13.8 million

While we cannot change the number of in-state licensed providers or the number of students who need support, we do have the power to adapt the delivery system, which Hazel Health's teletherapy offering does in a few distinct ways.



- 1. Affordability.** At just \$10 per student, Hazel Health’s offering is significantly less expensive than hiring full-time, school-based counseling staff. Hiring school-based staff also requires the added expenditures of recruitment, onboarding, training and retention, all of which are handled by Hazel.
- 2. Larger Provider Network.** Teletherapy maximizes the number of available mental health care providers. Since all sessions are virtual, Hazel can employ clinicians who live out-of-state, as well as part-time providers who are only available a few hours per week. In addition, providers can see a greater number of students since they do not commute or travel between school locations.
- 3. Adaptability.** When a district partners with Hazel, all students have access to both mental health and physical/urgent care telehealth services. This allows more flexibility to meet the number of students who need services throughout the year, which can fluctuate. Hazel supports counselors and other mental health staff by keeping caseloads manageable.
- 4. Differentiated Care.** Students are unique individuals with varied counseling needs. Hazel can address and resolve many acute concerns by offering students immediate, short-term care. This in turn creates more availability in the schedules of long-term providers so students who do need ongoing care have greater access.

Challenges With Hiring A Traditional Counselor	Solutions With Hazel Health
Costly to pay salaries as well as recruitment, onboarding, training and retention expenditures for behavioral health staff	Hazel manages the hiring and training of all counselors and case managers
Limited number of licensed providers in-state; challenging to arrange part-time schedules	With telehealth, Hazel can employ part-time clinicians, clinicians who are licensed in-state but live out-of-state, and also eliminate travel time to increase provider availability
Finite case loads and an unpredictable number of students in need	Allows more adaptability to meet the number of students who need services throughout the year
Trained to provide long-term care, even though some students only need a few sessions of counseling	Hazel provides acute and short-term counseling, which allows students to receive immediate care and creates more availability in the system for students who need long-term care

Whether the goal is to offer additional care options to expand the reach of on-staff counselors, or to provide a new, district-wide mental health care approach, Hazel Health offers a flexible and affordable solution. There is no intervention more important than ensuring students’ mental and emotional wellbeing during this unique school year; Hazel Health is here to make that possible.