

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Child Health Evaluation
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Parents Rate School Support Slim for Kids' Behavioral, Emotional Issues

School psychologists, counselors, and social workers provide support for children with a host of behavioral, emotional or family problems. These problems—ranging from attention deficit disorder to homelessness; from depression to bullying—can make it difficult for children to succeed in school. However, as school districts across the nation face significant financial challenges, school programs that support students' behavioral, emotional and mental health could be at risk.

To better understand the state of school support in this area, the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents to grade their children's public schools related to support for children with behavioral, emotional or family problems.

At the primary school level, only 37% of parents give primary schools an "A" for support for children with ADHD and other behavioral problems, and 34% gave an A for support for children with emotional or family problems. Grades were lower at the secondary level, where only 22% of parents give schools an "A" for support for children with behavioral, emotional or family problems. In contrast, parents gave schools higher marks for providing a good education overall (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of Parents Giving Public Schools an "A" for Support for Emotional, Behavioral and Family Problems and Providing a Good Education, by School Level

	A's for Primary Schools	A's for Secondary Schools
Support for children with emotional or family problems	34%	22%
Support for children with ADHD and other behavioral problems	37%	22%
Provides a good education for students overall	52%	38%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

The complete report cards for Table 1 items can be found on page 2. Of note, nearly one-half of parents give secondary schools a "C", "D" or "F" on support for children with emotional or family problems.

Report Highlight

About one-third of parents give primary schools an "A" for providing support for kids with behavioral, emotional or family problems; less than one-quarter of parents give secondary schools an "A".

Implications

For children to succeed in school, they need to function well and have their basic needs met. School psychologists, counselors, and social workers are tasked with meeting the wide variety of children's needs. According to national estimates, about 20% of school-aged children need formal mental health services related to conditions like autism, attention-deficit disorder, depression, and eating disorders; furthermore, as many as 50% of children need emotional support to deal with difficulties in family, peer, or other relationships. In this poll, parents indicate that schools are doing better with educational goals than with emotional and behavioral support.

In the current economic climate, some stakeholders argue that school funds should be restricted to instructional services. However, drastic cuts to student support services may, in the end, work against instructional objectives, if behavioral or emotional problems interfere with children's ability to learn.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,087 for parents with children in public schools) from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 56% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 1 to 7 percentage points, depending on the question. For subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

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Table 2. Report Card for Support for Children with Emotional or Family Problems, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	34%	22%
B	34%	33%
C	21%	30%
D	6%	9%
F	5%	6%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 3. Report Card for Support for Children with ADHD or Behavioral Problems, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	37%	22%
B	36%	38%
C	20%	28%
D	4%	5%
F	3%	7%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Table 4. Report Card for Providing a Good Education, by School Level

Grade	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
A	52%	38%
B	31%	37%
C	11%	15%
D	5%	7%
F	1%	3%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009