

The Jed Foundation (JED) and AASA District Mental Health Initiative

From Challenge to Change: School Districts as Catalysts for Student Well-Being

Mental health challenges are significantly impacting young people. Recent national statistics show that 40% of high school students report feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and 20% report having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.¹ Mental health is a top concern among parents; 40% report significant worry about their child's risk for depression or anxiety.²

Schools play a vital role in youth development and mental health, as a key ecosystem for our youth. Despite significant efforts, there is still inadequate support and services available for student mental health and suicide prevention in schools. For example, the average student-to-school counselor ratio in the nation is two times the recommended ratio indicating a significant school counselor shortage,³ and only a small portion of schools are equipped to assess and treat student mental health symptoms.⁴

Decisions concerning students' mental health in schools often necessitate school district governance, exceeding the authority of individual schools. This includes critical areas such as long-term project funding, partnership agreements, policy formulation, and the adoption of learning curricula. Consequently, intervention at the school district level is crucial for impactful change.

Students need opportunities to develop resilience and strong social connections. And school staff deserve support learning how to identify issues and intervene early, connect students to mental health support and resources, and ensure their safety in and outside of school. Schools and districts need solutions that will prioritize and promote the well-being of students through a systematic approach that results in long-term culture change for their communities. JED's [evidence-based Comprehensive Approach](#) lays a foundation for sustainable change that supports mental health and reduces the risk of suicide among young people.

¹ [Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report, CDC, 2024](#)

² [Pew Research Center, 2023](#)

³ [American School Counselor Association, 2023](#)

⁴ [National Center for Education Statistics, 2024](#)

Addressing the Urgent Need

“ I’ve never heard a superintendent say to me that they don’t have mental health problems in their district. What they do say is ‘I don’t know how to solve them.’ There is a widespread passion and interest to improve mental health outcomes for youth. ”

–Tony Walker, PhD, Senior Vice President,
School Programs and Consulting, JED

The Solution: JED and AASA District Mental Health Initiative

JED works with high schools, colleges, and universities across the country to equip their communities with evidence-based resources and solutions to create a culture of care in which all students feel seen and supported. Guided by the success of [JED’s impact in higher education](#), JED has expanded its work to serve pre-K–12 school districts throughout the country. The [JED and AASA District Mental Health Initiative \(DMHI\)](#) is a three-year program developed by JED and in partnership with AASA, The School Superintendents Association, tailored to support district leaders as they improve their school mental health systems. As a leader in protecting student mental health and preventing suicide, our goal is to fully support school districts in making meaningful, sustainable, and measurable improvements in student well-being.

Delivering a Comprehensive Mental Health Solution

“ For students to be receptive to learning and to thrive, they need to be mentally well, feel psychologically safe, and experience social connectedness and a sense of belonging. The DMHI enables engagement, better academic performance, progression through grade levels, and the development of essential values for becoming productive adults. ”

JED’s Comprehensive Approach emphasizes help-seeking and help-giving as crucial, aligning with the universal desire for the well-being of children and the development of healthy individuals. ”

–Jennifer Reed, MS, Senior Director, District
Mental Health Initiative, JED

The DMHI partners directly with school district superintendents to establish and update their mental health and suicide prevention policies and programs that serve the entire school district community. This top-down approach is critical and highly effective.⁵ When leadership actively champions mental health through strategic decisions, policy creation, budget allocation, and community engagement, it sets a powerful precedent.

⁵ [The Wallace Foundation, 2004](#)

Delivering What Districts Need

“What I appreciate about JED’s approach is they’re on the ground with the district leaders. They understand the community deeply when they’re offering coaching insight and support. They don’t approach any district as if it’s like the one they are in before or the one they are going to next. That tailored, personal, in-person approach adds to the effectiveness and strengthens JED’s ability to support districts in really meaningful ways. ”

–John Malloy, EdD, Assistant Executive Director, Leadership Network, AASA, The School Superintendents Association; Former Superintendent, San Ramon Valley Unified School District

The initiative is grounded in [JED’s Comprehensive Approach for Districts](#). This evidence-based framework brings together recommended practices with expertise from the field to help districts create a strong and supportive school mental health system that fosters truly connected, thriving school communities. During the program, an expert-led team assesses and analyzes input from students, principals, staff, and district leaders to identify the current climate, needs, policies, programs, and practices surrounding student mental health in each district. Then, leveraging their existing strengths, the same dedicated team helps districts to create and execute a customized strategic plan resulting in a best-in-class school mental health system that supports the well-being of students in both the short term and the years to come.



What School District Leaders are Saying

“There is no health without mental health, and if left untreated or inadequately treated, it can negatively impact a young person’s ability to learn and grow. Schools are on the front lines of the mental health crisis, making educators agents of change. Participating in the DMHI ensures that our students have learning environments that are emotionally and physically safe and healthy. This ultimately promotes caring relationships and culturally responsive routes that enhance whole child development while minimizing future trauma, supporting families, and building an infrastructure of health. ”

–Franklin R. Narducci, Superintendent of Chandler Unified School District

An Engaged and Empowered District Leads to Student Success

When a school district joins DMHI, it sends a powerful statement about its commitment to student mental health. The entire community is impacted — district and building leaders, school teachers and staff, the students, and their families. Their ecosystem is forever changed. Systemic change at the district level impacts individual schools and school staff supporting them in implementing programs and practices that support student mental health and prevent suicide. As a result, students develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to learn and thrive. This strengthens students’ mental health and reduces suicides.



DMHI In Action

“ We have this unique opportunity to work with a small and remote tribal-serving district. The teachers and village members are also the first responders. Some of the elders there brought up a recent tragedy that their community faced — they lost five people to suicide. Yet they felt unable to talk about it. There was shame surrounding suicide, making it even harder for the community to grieve and heal.

I delivered a training that teaches people how to recognize signs of distress on the continuum of mental health. During the training, one elder (who was also a first responder in the village) opened up about her experiences and, for the first time, talked about the fact that her daughter died by suicide. She had guilt and shame attached to this experience, but in the end, she could be a voice and name to this work. There was a way to help prevent it. People she helped could go forth and not have the same tragic ending or shame she once had. This woman inspires me every day. ”

—Sheril Morgan Menefee, MS, District Mental Health Specialist, JED

Appendix

About The Jed Foundation (JED)

Summary

For 25 years, The Jed Foundation (JED) has led transformative efforts in youth mental health and suicide prevention. Founded to address an urgent and underrecognized crisis on college campuses, JED brings creative, collaborative, evidence-based solutions that are helping reshape how educational institutions and community organizations address student mental health and suicide prevention. In doing so, JED's work serves as a model for how to advance youth mental health and suicide prevention.

To date, JED has partnered with schools to serve more than 7 million students with its evidence-based mental health and suicide prevention programs. In addition, JED engages millions of stakeholders—including young people, educators, parents, community leaders — through online resources, campaigns, training, and advising projects. In 2024 alone, our website received 2.2 million site visits, and our video content garnered 18 million views. These metrics reflect the widespread demand in and trust for JED's expertise.

Our Mission

JED is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults, giving them the skills and support they need to thrive today...and tomorrow.

The Story of JED

In 1998, Phil and Donna Satow lost their youngest son, Jed, to suicide. Although suicide was and continues to be a leading cause of death among young adults, schools had no uniform model for preventing suicide on campus, and shame and secrecy too often precluded honest discussion of mental health. In 2000, the Satows founded The Jed Foundation (JED) to surmount these hurdles and create a blueprint for prevention.

Today, JED is a leading organization dedicated to young adult mental health. With our school and community partners, we're helping students navigate the emotional challenges of high school and college, prepare for adulthood, and thrive.



Our Approach

Our work is guided by the [Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention](#), an evidence-based framework originally adapted from the U.S. Air Force's suicide prevention strategy and honed by two decades of experience. This framework holistically addresses young people's emotional well-being through seven thematic domains:

- foster life skills
- promote connectedness and positive culture
- recognize and respond to signs of distress
- reduce barriers to help-seeking
- ensure access to effective mental health care
- establish systems of crisis management, and
- reduce access to lethal means.

What We Do and Its Impact

Strengthening Schools and Communities Through Systems Change

School is a critical part of students' support network and emotional safety net. JED partners with [high schools](#), [districts](#), [colleges](#), and [community-based organizations](#) to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems.

JED's work has reached more than 1,200 schools and more than 7 million students. Students at schools that completed the JED Campus program [reported less suicide risk](#): They were 10% less likely to experience suicidal ideation, 13% less likely to make a suicide plan, and 25% less likely to attempt suicide.

JED provides [mental health education and training](#) to school and community providers to create a culture of caring that protects student mental health, builds life skills, and increases the likelihood that students will be recognized, supported, and connected to mental health care. These trainings equip "help-givers" with the knowledge about young adult mental health and suicide risk that they need to support young people in their lives.

JED provides [postvention and crisis response consulting services](#) to compassionately meet the needs of a school or community in the aftermath of a suicide or other tragic event.





Equipping Individuals With the Skills They Need to Thrive

Building resiliency, life skills, and social connections, while encouraging help-seeking and giving, helps teens and young adults manage challenges and thrive. JED equips individuals and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other.

JED's [Mental Health Resource Center](#) offers teens and young adults tools for emotional health, coping, and supporting others. We also offer accessible, emotionally attuned support and resources for trusted adults (parents, caregivers, educators, and coaches). Tools like [Set to Go](#) help students, their families, and educators prepare high school students for life after graduation.

Media and online algorithms profoundly influence young people's identity, emotional norms, and help-seeking behaviors. JED's [Storytelling and Culture Change Center](#) helps to reshape how we think and talk about mental health by reaching youth where they are through the people and brands that they trust.

- We collaborate with influential partners to co-create and deliver high-impact, evidence-based campaigns. Recent projects include [Mind Matters](#) (creator-led emotional health tips), [Invisible Game](#) (featuring intergenerational conversations with top athletes), and [JED Voices: K-pop](#) (activating and equipping fandoms).
- We advise and partner with entertainment organizations, media platforms, content creators, and celebrities to encourage accurate, nuanced portrayals of youth mental health and suicide prevention. We co-create trusted tools for storytellers — like the [Mental Health Media Guide](#) and the [Digital Storytelling Guide](#).
- We advance system-level improvements across social media, gaming, and artificial intelligence (AI) models to reduce harm, elevate protective design, and increase platform accountability.

This work has been recognized with over 30 major awards, including the Peabody, Emmy, Webby, Effie, Shorty, Halo, and Mental Health America Media Awards. In 2024 alone, JED partnered with more than 30 media and entertainment platforms, creators, and coalitions to shape how mental health shows up in youth storytelling and digital environments, reaching over 20 million young people and driving more than 2 million visits to our Mental Health Resource Center.



Mobilizing Communities to Take Action in Promoting Youth Mental Health

Our mental health is impacted by the world around us, and many factors can influence the perspective, well-being, and behaviors of our teens and young adults. JED encourages community awareness, understanding, and action for youth mental health.

Guided by [JED's Policy Agenda](#), JED advocates for and helps advance systematic, comprehensive state and federal policies to create a culture of caring to protect youth mental health. Through policy summits, roundtable events, direct advising, and impactful partnerships, JED's goal is to ensure that youth mental health is a top priority in this country.



Expanding Our Reach and Impact Through High-Impact Partnerships

We accelerate systemic change by fostering innovation, sharing expertise, and scaling evidence-based solutions that protect youth mental health and prevent suicide. Key partnerships with leading networked organizations help expand our reach, visibility, and impact.

- We partnered with [AASA, the School Superintendents Association](#), to launch the District Mental Health Initiative (DMHI), which offers JED's Comprehensive Approach to pre-K–12 school districts across the country.
- We partnered with [America's Promise Alliance](#) to deliver JED's Comprehensive Approach to community-based organizations (CBOs) across the country in their membership network.
- We partnered with the [State Higher Education Executive Officers Association \(SHEEO\)](#) to launch learning communities to develop and implement policy recommendations that support college student mental health.

Together, these partnerships help expand the reach and impact of our Comprehensive Approach to millions of young people each year.

Our Expertise and Thought Leadership

We conduct, publish, and disseminate research reports on critical mental health topics important to this nation's young people. Recent reports delve into [current trends and rates of youth suicide](#), [mental health stigma among teens](#), as well as mental health [among fraternity members](#), and [in the metaverse](#).

These reports are shared widely with diverse audiences, including colleges/universities, high schools, policymakers, parents/caregivers, families, and students.

Our Staffing, Budget, and Funding

JED is growing and expanding with more than [100 full-time staff members](#), 20 members of our Board of Directors, and [24 Advisory Board members](#). JED is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator, is accredited by the Better Business Bureau, and achieved Gold Transparency from Candid. JED's 2025 operating budget is \$24,175,538. More details about our financial position are available on our [audited financial statements](#).