



Jenny Ryan, LCSW-C
Chief Clinical Officer | Backpack Healthcare
jryan@hellobackpack.com

As Chief Clinical Officer, licensed certified clinical social worker, and advocate for mental health, I have seen the direct experience of telehealth therapy and its profound benefits. The transition to virtual sessions has not only broadened the reach of mental health care but has also markedly improved the therapeutic experience for both my clients and myself. An important benefit is the improved accessibility provided by telehealth, as it removes obstacles of geography, local services, long waitlists, in addition to finding the right clinician match. This is especially valuable for children who lack control over their transportation to and from therapy sessions, relying on others for assistance.

I frequently hear from parents about the challenges of taking their children to therapy sessions, often resulting in missed school days or the inability to coordinate evening appointments due to busy schedules. Many parents navigate full-time jobs, part-time commitments, and the demands of multiple children, making it challenging to prioritize and attend in-person therapy sessions.

Expanding the conversation to schools, the establishment of designated spaces for virtual therapy during school hours empowers students to access the support they need without disrupting their academic routine. These spaces offer a private and comfortable environment, ensuring students can engage in therapy without privacy concerns or interruptions at home. The integration of therapy spaces into the school setting not only underscores the significance of mental health in education but also acknowledges the practicalities of students' lives. This strategy facilitates a smooth integration of academic and emotional well-being support, enabling students to engage in therapy during dedicated hours and avoiding exhaustion from a complete school day. It provides a quiet environment free from home distractions, and parents can join virtually without disrupting their workday or pulling the child from the majority of their school day.

We also observe a decrease in the demand for schools to supply a sufficient number of clinicians for each school. Instead, it enables the utilization of community resources to tackle the growing mental health crisis in youth. Virtual therapy facilitates partners in efficiently reaching students across various schools, expanding service availability (especially since evenings and weekend service availability might be limited). It also allows students to seek support in environments where stressors may necessitate additional assistance

This comprehensive approach not only normalizes the concept of mental health care but also advocates for a proactive and holistic approach to education, prioritizing the overall well-being of students, while also supporting the strain on schools to have enough providers to serve all students that need devoted care. The proposed legislation further recognizes the importance of addressing mental health in schools and emphasizes the imperative to embrace virtual mental health services.