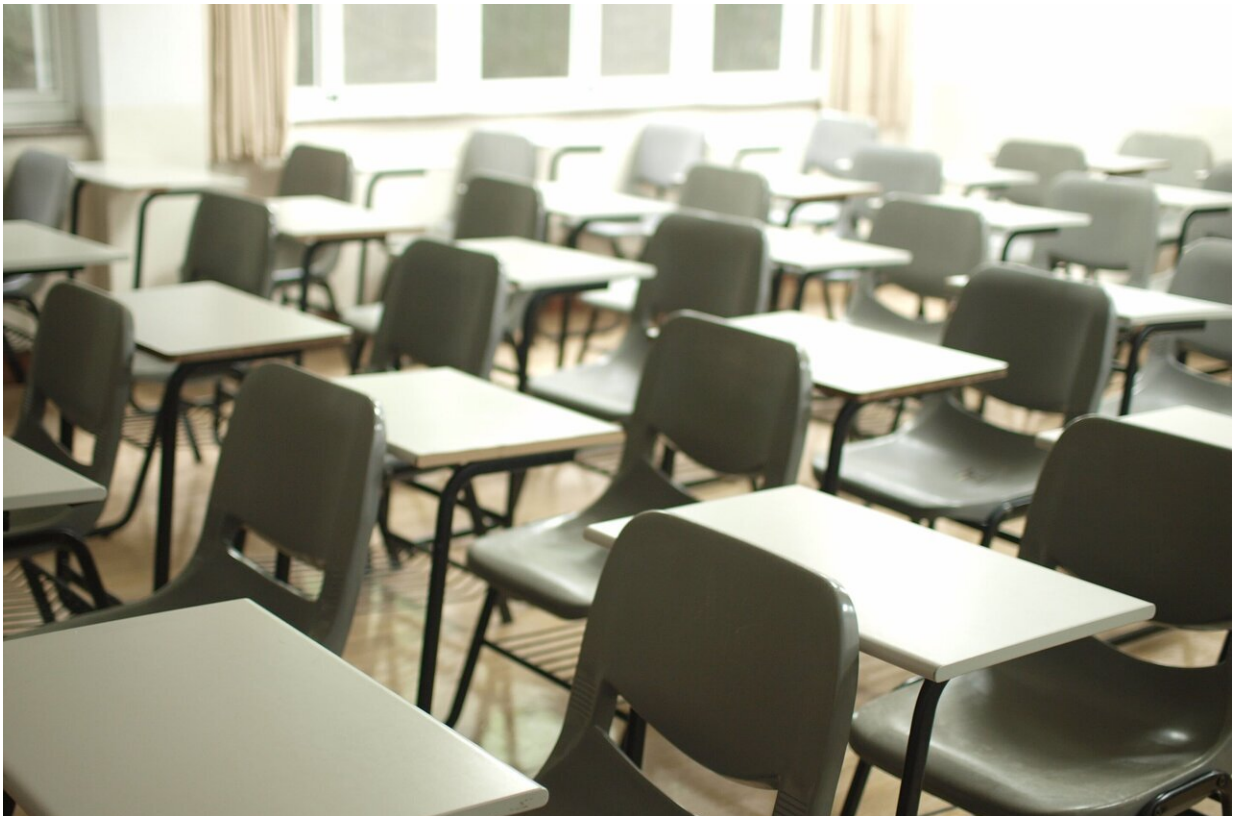


# Schools are key in tackling youth depression, review finds

April 26 2023, by Joe Golfen

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School-based depression prevention programs may reduce the risk of depression diagnoses and depressive symptoms in K-12 students, according to new findings from University of Oregon researchers.

The results are part of the first research review by the University of Oregon's newly launched HEDCO Institute for Evidence-Based Educational Practice.

Looking at data from 70 studies with a combined total of 44,519 students, the review found that, on average, students in [depression prevention](#) programs had a 33% reduced risk of depression compared to students in control groups. The report also found that depression prevention programs may result in less severe depression symptoms in students.

"Our nation is experiencing an unprecedented youth mental health crisis," said Emily Tanner-Smith, Thomson Professor of Prevention Science and executive director of the HEDCO institute, part of the UO's College of Education. "Educators wanted to know how they could help prevent student depression and wanted us to find out the types of evidence-based programs that might work for their student population."

The report concluded that future depression prevention programs are more likely to work than not. There is an estimated 83% probability that students' average risk of depression will improve after program implementation and an estimated 70% probability that students' average depression symptoms will improve.

However, the data were not sufficient to say for which students the programs will work best. Future research needs to be done to better understand who benefits the most from which programs.

Depression is one of the most common mental health challenges facing students today, affecting nearly five million youth in 2021, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Additionally, the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey from the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention also found that 44% of [high school students](#) reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year, up from 28% in 2011.

Commissioned by the Ballmer Institute for Children's Behavioral Health, the goal of the review was to understand how school-based depression prevention programs might affect youth mental health and well-being. Researchers reviewed prevention programs that were focused specifically on reducing depression and offered to students during the school day.

Schools are one of the few places where nearly all children and adolescents can be reached. Providing prevention services in the [school setting](#) can eliminate the many barriers families face when they seek out mental health support.

"Depression prevention programs are one way that schools can help students directly and immediately, but it is important to note that these programs can only accomplish so much," said Sean Grant, research associate professor at the HEDCO institute. "These programs are not designed to tackle the structural causes of the current youth [mental health crisis](#). In addition to school-based programs, we need other interventions focused on the social determinants of youth mental health."

The report also highlights the shortcomings and variations in outcomes of the current research in the area, such as a lack of diversity in student populations represented in the research or cultural adaptations of programs, highlighting the advantage of using rigorous methods for evidence synthesis.

The HEDCO institute created practical guides that translate the results for state-level education staff and district administrators and educators, so they could put the information into action. The practical guides

include profiles of the identified depression prevention programs and are designed to help educators select the program that might be appropriate for their educational context.

Launched earlier this year, the HEDCO institute conducts a process known as evidence synthesis, which involves reviewing the findings of multiple research studies and combining the information together to get a more holistic view of the results. To guide its research questions and conclusions, the institute sought direct feedback from educational leaders as part of its eight-person [advisory board](#) and other education stakeholders, helping keep the institute appraised of current and emerging issues in education across the county.

Future reviews at the institute might look at issues such as four-day school weeks and additional mental and behavioral health [prevention programs](#) for students and teachers.

**More information:** Do school-based depression prevention programs support youth? [hedcoinstitute.uoregon.edu/dep...on-prevention-review](https://hedcoinstitute.uoregon.edu/dep...on-prevention-review)

Provided by University of Oregon

Citation: Schools are key in tackling youth depression, review finds (2023, April 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-schools-key-tackling-youth-depression.html>

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