The background of the slide is a painting of a large, powerful wave crashing onto a beach. The water is a deep, dark blue, and the foam is white and turbulent. The beach is a warm, reddish-brown color. In the lower right foreground, a small, dark silhouette of a person is sitting on the sand, looking out at the ocean. The overall mood is one of vastness and perhaps a sense of being overwhelmed, which aligns with the title's focus on mental health challenges.

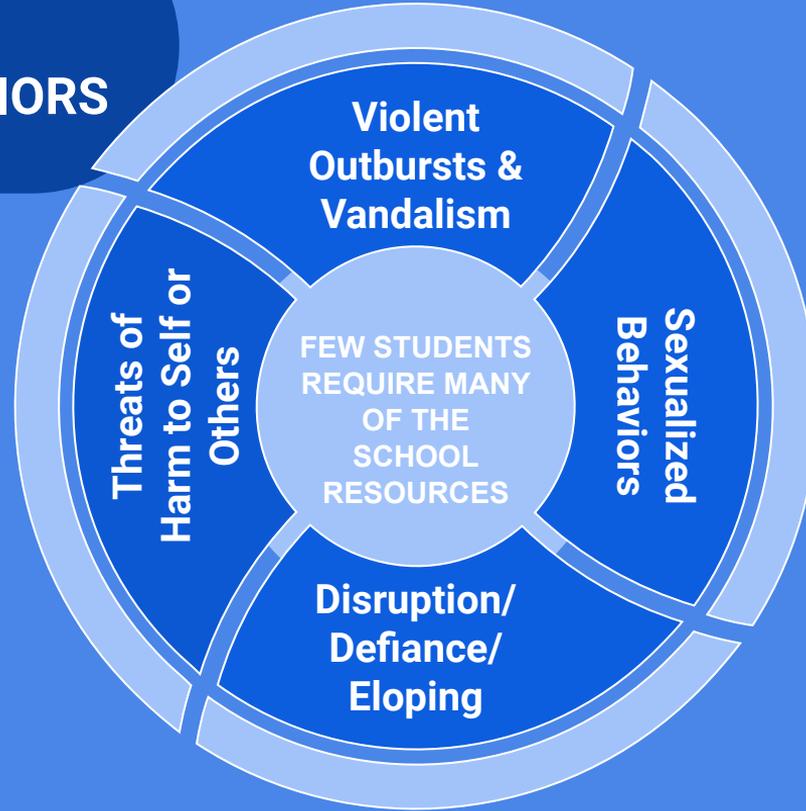
Mental Health Challenges in Vermont Schools in the Time of COVID

January 11, 2022

Testimony Vermont Senate Education Committee

Lynn Cota, Superintendent
Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union

**GROWING COMPLEXITY
AND SEVERITY
OF STUDENT BEHAVIORS**



LIMITED OUTSIDE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

01

Local Mental Health Designated Agencies

- Limited mental health counseling
- Limited family based mental health services
- Limited In school support services
- Long waitlists
- Staffing shortages (>20% vacancies overall, 37% of vacancies in school-based programs, some programs >50% vacancies)

02

Human Services

- DCF referrals up
- Workforce shortage (nearly 50% at one time)
- Pandemic barriers to in home support for families

03

Intensive Therapeutic Programs & Resources

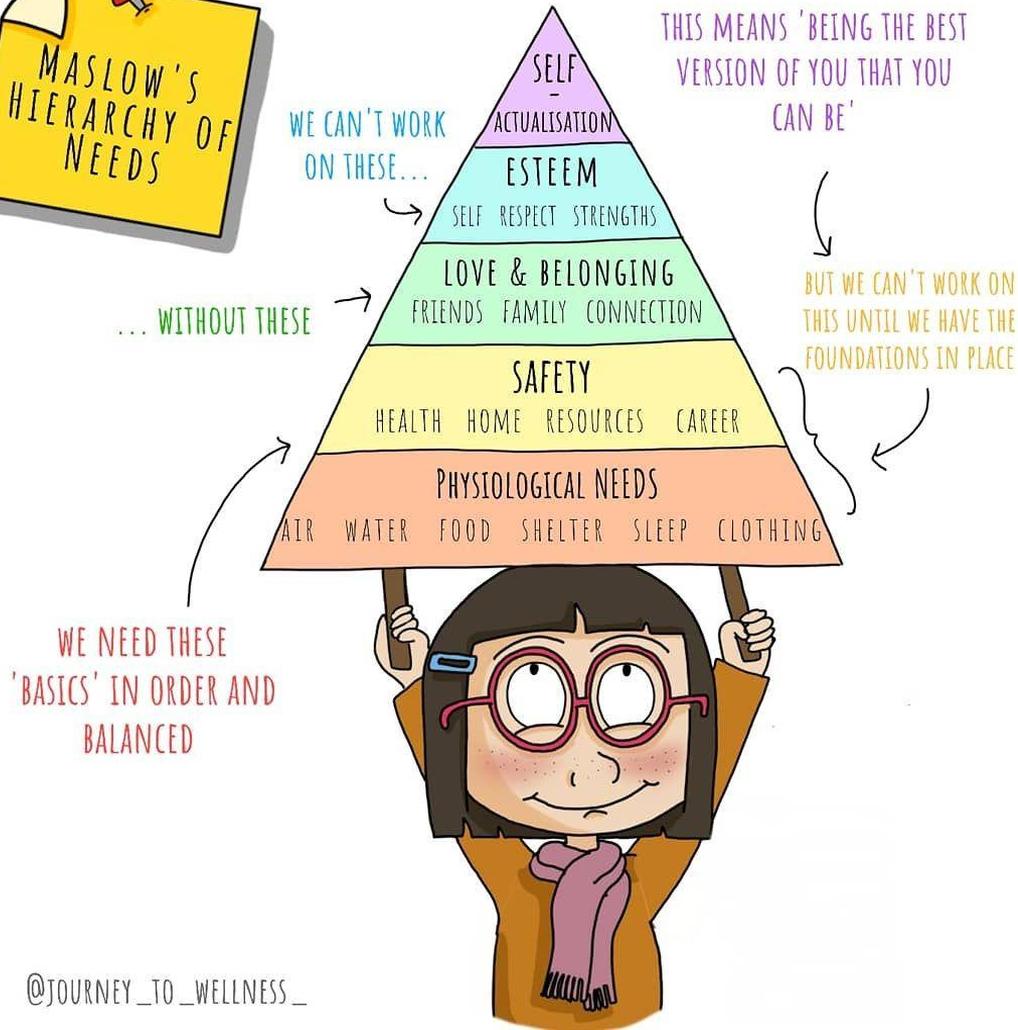
- Long waitlists for more intensive therapeutic alternative programs (> a year in some cases)
- Limited availability for residential mental health treatment placements - some have closed
- Limited short term stabilization/crisis beds - some have closed

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

ADULT MENTAL HEALTH

SUBSTANCE USE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Until we meet the basic needs of students and families, we cannot expect students to be proficient in academic or social emotional skills.

- **Food/Water**
- **Housing**
- **Safety**
- **Clothing**
- **Resources - Mental Health, Economic, Healthcare, and Childcare**

A photograph of a stack of several large, grey, rectangular stones or concrete blocks. The stones are stacked in a slightly irregular manner, with some leaning against each other. They are positioned in front of a red wooden wall with vertical planks. The ground is dark, possibly mulch or soil, and there is some green grass visible at the bottom of the frame. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**The Pandemic has
caused greater
instability to the
foundation that holds
up our schools!**

Human Services

- Address Salary Inequities Related to Staffing Shortages
- Fund Resources to Ensure Families Can Access Services that Address Basic Needs

Basic Needs for Families

- Food
- Shelter
- Healthcare
- Services
- Safety
- High Quality Childcare
- Broadband Access

PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FACED IN VERMONT SCHOOLS

Designated Mental Health Agencies

Increase funding for Designated Mental Health Agencies

- Suicide Prevention
- Addiction
- Domestic Violence
- Youth Mental Health Counseling
- Adult Mental Health Counseling
- Intensive Family Based Services
- Mental Health Services in School

Intensive Mental Health Resources for Youth

- Intensive/Therapeutic In Patient Programs
- Stabilization Beds
- Step-Down Resources
- Therapeutic Alternative Programs
- Equitable Regional Access to Resources

The best way to support Vermont schools with mental health, is to support the systems schools rely upon to support children and families in crisis. If we can work to ensure that families have access to necessary resources to meet their basic human needs, fewer students will require more intensive interventions.

When we can offer necessary resources and services for children and families when they need it, everyone wins!

