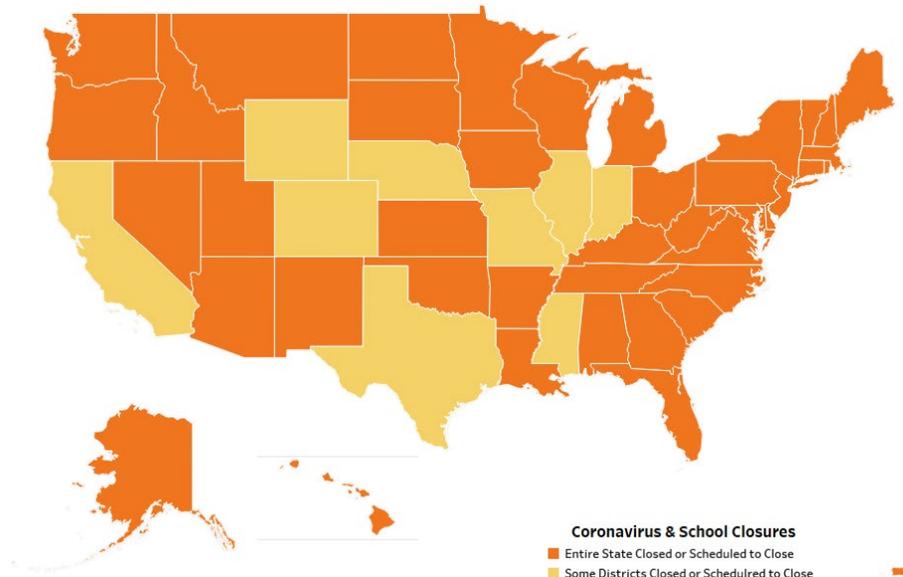


## As Schools Close due to the Coronavirus, Mental Health Care for Children Must be Protected

Xiaoyan Zhang

Thirty-nine U.S. states have ordered school closures to help reduce the spread of the rapidly evolving infectious respiratory disease COVID-19 and to protect the vulnerable populations most at risk, including older adults and those with a underlying health conditions. As of March 18, 2020, this action affects at least 91,000 U.S. public and private schools which serve 41.7 million students, accounting for 73.7% of the total population.<sup>1</sup> Although this strategy is necessary in the face of the pandemic, it is vitally important to understand that these closures, along with other public health measures such as social distancing, quarantine and isolation, can take a toll on mental health and further exacerbate many students' existing mental health problems.<sup>2</sup> Nationwide, 1 in 6 youth in the U.S. aged 6-17 experience serious mental health disorders,<sup>3</sup> and schools are often the front line for the provision of mental health services. As schools close, I urge service providers and state and local governments to make resources available to support our children's mental health and to reduce, as far as possible, the negative effects associated with school closures, while we combat the coronavirus pandemic.



**Figure 1. U.S. States with School Closures due to Coronavirus, as of 03/18/20**

Map: Xiaoyan Zhang; Data Source: Education Week<sup>1</sup>

### Endnotes

1. Education Week (2020). Map: Coronavirus and School Closures. Retrieved March 18, 2020 from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures.html>
2. American Psychological Association (2020). Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>
3. National Alliance on Mental Illness (2018). Mental Health by the Numbers. Retrieved from: <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

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