



Protecting the Prevention Infrastructure Supporting NJ Students

Many students in crisis were once students who could have been reached earlier.
NJ4S is how we reach them.

In response to the youth mental health crisis, the State of New Jersey launched the New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services Network (NJ4S), a statewide system designed to support youth mental wellness through prevention, early intervention, and connection to care.

THE CHALLENGE

\$43 million in NJ4S funding is proposed for elimination in FY27.

276,118

students, caregivers, and educators served statewide in year one
(DCF 2025 NJ4S Annual Report)

“NJ has finally come through with a good product, and Union County is stronger for it. It would be a gigantic step back to lose this service now...they are making a difference, and we should not see that end!”

— Toni Anthony & Gina Jurkota, SAC & School Therapist, Cranford High School

NJ4S Tiered Model

Tier 1 – Prevention

Workshops, assemblies, and programs that build life skills, resilience, and awareness.

1

Tier 2 – Early Intervention

Small-group supports and evidence-based programs for students experiencing early warning signs.

2

Tier 3 – Brief Clinical Support

Short-term individualized services from clinicians and referrals to community mental health providers.

3



A coordinated system of support for schools, students and families.



SCHOOLS



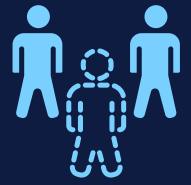
NJ4S HUBS



MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

A Clinician Shortage Makes Prevention Essential

Across the country, communities face a severe shortage of youth mental health clinicians. Without prevention and early-intervention systems in place, schools are left to respond only after students are in crisis — resulting in more ER visits, more psychiatric hospitalizations, and more classroom disruptions. New Jersey has already built the system that addresses this gap.



(Source: DCF 2026 NJ4S Formative Report)

Building on Existing Infrastructure

New Jersey has already made **significant investments** in establishing the NJ4S statewide hub network and building partnerships with schools and community providers.

Building on this infrastructure allows the state to **leverage existing systems** and relationships while expanding access to school-based mental health services.

In January 2026, DCF's own Office of Applied Research and Evaluation submitted a **formative report** documenting NJ4S's strengths — including its Hub and Spoke model, credible-messenger staff, and holistic prevention approach.

The state's planned outcomes evaluation has not yet been conducted — **meaning NJ4S is being proposed for elimination before the full evidence is in.**



School engagement increased by 45% in the program's second year.

(NJ DCF 2025 NJ4S Annual Report)



97%

of referred students successfully accessed the community resource or service in 2023.

(NJ DCF 2025 NJ4S Annual Report)

NJ4S Union Hub Impact | 2023-Present

37,145

community members provided with wellness-focused workshops & events

28,431

students reached through small group evidence-based curriculum

262

students worked 1:1 with one of our clinicians to get care

These successes are the result of sustained investment. Eliminating NJ4S now would weaken the very system New Jersey built — and move us further away from preventing crises before they begin.

We urge the Legislature to restore NJ4S funding in the FY27 budget.



Prevention Links is a New Jersey nonprofit dedicated to preventing substance use, promoting mental wellness, and strengthening families and communities. For more than 50 years, the organization has partnered with schools, community organizations, and public agencies across the state. As the NJ4S Union Hub grantee, we work with schools and community partners to help close the youth mental health support gap for Union County students and families.