



STATE OF ARKANSAS
SARAH HUCKABEE SANDERS
GOVERNOR

July 1, 2024

Dear Arkansas Superintendents:

Last month, we met with a group of Arkansas superintendents to discuss the mental health crisis facing our students. The Natural State is not unique; youth depression, anxiety, and isolation have risen across the country. But we *do* have a unique opportunity to address this crisis in a collaborative way.

We have made this a priority in our Administration, and we are committing state resources to help with this crisis. To that end, we are excited to announce a pilot program focused on two key priorities: restricting in-school phone use and mental healthcare. We invite your district to join this statewide effort.

The average American teen now spends nearly 5 hours a day on social media, usually on their phone, often in school. Spending three or more hours a day on social media doubles kids' risk of mental health problems. Since smartphones became widespread, suicide rates have tripled among young teens, self-harm among girls has gone up nearly 200%, and depression among teenagers has increased 150%. Teen math, reading, and science scores have dropped in the United States and other developed nations since 2012, while school alienation has risen across the board. To help address these issues, this pilot grant program will provide pouches for students to safely store their phones during the school day, creating a better learning environment and inviting in-person socialization.

School leaders have also told us that there is a need for more mental health services, especially in areas of our state with a shortage of mental health professionals. This grant program will also provide funding for telehealth mental health services.

Thank you for your willingness to work with us on this issue. Addressing the youth mental health crisis is a daunting task, but we know that together, we can help students in Arkansas.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jacob Oliva in blue ink.

Jacob Oliva
Arkansas Secretary of Education

Handwritten signature of Sarah Huckabee Sanders in blue ink.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders
Governor of Arkansas

State Capitol Building • Little Rock, AR 72201
Telephone: (501) 682-2345
www.governor.arkansas.gov