

Kids' mental health getting more notice

By Susan Skiles Luke
The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The shootings at Columbine High School did more than shock Americans about the realities of teen-age violence. It also prompted them to examine their own children more closely.

Mental health clinics and therapists across the country say they have seen a surge of younger patients since the shootings April 20 in Littleton, Colo., as concerned parents and educators seek help for kids whom they suspect of serious emotional problems.

"We had to open up 12 more beds in the last six weeks for adolescents and children," says Roxane Harcourt, chief operating officer of Charter Indianapolis Behavioral Health Care System. Harcourt says the hospital has seen a 30% increase in patients under 17 in the past six weeks.

Magellan Behavioral Health, which refers 64 million adults and children to mental-health programs nationwide, says its calls in May jumped 25% over the same month of the previous year. "It appears that people all across the country are so shaken by this incident that they're not taking any chances," says Erin Somers, a spokeswoman for Magellan.

The massacre in Littleton, where two students killed 12 classmates, a teacher and themselves, followed other fatal school shootings in recent years in Pearl, Miss.; Paducah, Ky.; Jonesboro, Ark.; and Springfield, Ore.

The shootings are making parents take more notice of the psychological needs of children.

"People and schools have become more aware that mental illness is out there," says Mary, whose 12-year-old son threatened another student and was diagnosed with manic depression shortly before the shootings in Littleton. The secretary from Alexandria, Va., asked that her full name not be used.

Her son, Danny, told a fellow sixth-grader at his school last December that he planned to "get a gun and kill her." That got Danny suspended for five days.

At the time, even though he was being treated for depression, no one knew he suffered from bipolar disorder, a disease that produces extreme mood swings.

Racial split remains in nation's schools

Minority enrollment in America's public schools is climbing, but most students still attend schools dominated by others of their own race and income level, a Harvard University report says.

Since 1968, enrollment of Hispanic students has increased 218%, and nearly 75% of them attend predominantly minority schools, says the report by the Civil Rights Project, a research and advocacy organization run by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Law School.

Enrollment of black students has risen 22%, and 69% of them attend schools where at least half the students are from minority groups, the report says.

The report was based on a study of Education Department enrollment data from the late 1960s through the mid-1990s.

Black and Hispanic students generally remain in black- and Hispanic-majority schools even when they live in the suburbs.

BRIEFS "We are clearly in a period when many policy-makers, courts and opinionmakers assume that desegregation is no longer necessary," the report says.

The study attributes much of the trend of minority- or white-dominated schools to economics and housing patterns. White flight to private schools was apparently not one of the reasons for the changes.

Researchers also note that many larger districts have won court permission to end desegregation orders. They include Mobile, Ala., Buffalo, Cleveland and Seattle.

No tuition repayment for sectarian school

MONTPELIER, Vt. — The Vermont Supreme Court has upheld a lower court's ruling that the Chittenden school district may not reimburse tuition for a sectarian school.

The decision, issued Friday, says a school district violates the Vermont Constitution when it reimburses tuition for a sectarian school without making sure the funds aren't used for religious worship.

The decision stems from a case in the town of Chittenden, where the school board voted in 1995 to pay for students to attend a Catholic school, Mount St. Joseph Academy, in Rutland. Chittenden doesn't have a high school and must pay tuition for its students to attend public or independent schools in other towns.

After the board approved payment of tuition for 15 Chittenden students to attend the Catholic school, the Vermont Department of Education cut off its portion of district aid.

Chittenden sued in Superior Court in Rutland, where a judge ruled in 1997 against the plan.

The school board has had a change in membership and has dropped its proposal to send students to the parochial school. But the case already was before the state Supreme Court, which continued to deliberate the constitutionality of the plan.

On Friday, the court upheld the Superior Court decision, saying the policy that was proposed by Chittenden did not restrict enough how the money would be used.

The court concluded "that a school district violates Chapter 1, Article 3 when it reimburses tuition for a sectarian school . . . in the absence of adequate safeguards against the use of such funds for religious worship."

The Associated Press

Q: What is the administration's response to the recently released Harvard study that claims that school resegregation is on the rise and that the Clinton administration has not acted to reverse the trend?

A: We are absolutely committed to the complementary goals of excellence and equity in our nation's schools. In this global, information-based economy it is imperative to give all of our children the high-quality education and skills they need to succeed. Thus, we have vigorously enforced this country's civil rights laws to ensure that no student is denied the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. Also, we have supported and increased funding for magnet schools, charter schools and other public school choice programs that increase the opportunities for students to achieve academic success in racially-diverse settings. For instance, our most recent budget calls for an increase of \$10 million to establish high-quality academic programs at magnet schools that will enroll racially diverse students from urban-suburban school district partnerships. [TK – add numbers for charters and other public choice programs] The most effective way to integrate the schools over time is by improving the quality of all schools. All parents – of all races and backgrounds – want their children to receive an excellent education. This administration ended the tyranny of low-expectations for low-income – and mostly minority -- students by insisting that schools hold all students to the same educational standards. As we have raised expectations, we have also provided increased resources for schools serving those students in the greatest need. Our focus on investments in public education to provide smaller classes, well-trained teachers, after-school and summer school programs, and technology will ultimately help those schools attract students of every background.