

A smiling man with a beard, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and jeans, stands in a classroom. He has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a wall covered with various posters and educational materials. The entire image has a green color overlay.

# Preventing Service Gaps Amid Persistent Staffing Shortages

How eLuma Helps Districts  
Protect Compliance, Continuity,  
and Student Progress

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# When Staffing Shortages Become Systemic

School staffing challenges have shifted dramatically. What were once localized, persistent shortages in specific roles have become a widespread crisis. Pandemic-era burnout, high turnover among early-career educators, and increased competition from other industries have intensified the strain. While teacher shortages are not new, the current conditions are more severe and harder for schools to manage.

For more than 15 years, eLuma has partnered with school districts navigating persistent shortages across mental health, special education, and related services. **This eBook examines how service gaps develop, how they cascade across tiered student support systems, and how districts can prevent disruption.**



# The Crisis Landscape: Rising Needs, Shrinking Capacity

Districts are experiencing sustained pressure to meet timelines, maintain documentation, and deliver services as required, despite shrinking capacity. As student needs grow and hiring timelines extend, leaders are forced to make high-stakes decisions with limited options.

As of June 2025, students with disabilities represent a significant and growing portion of the K–12 population.<sup>5</sup> This increases the need for IEP evaluations, ongoing therapy services, and heightened compliance requirements, all of which demand qualified staff. Meanwhile, rates of teen anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts have **increased by more than 40%** over the past decade,<sup>1</sup> affirming the need for consistent mental and behavioral health support.

However, staffing shortages present significant roadblocks to addressing these challenges. National analyses show widespread staffing instability across education roles, with **approximately 1 in 8 being either vacant or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments.**<sup>6</sup>

✓ More than half of school-based speech-language pathologists report shortages in their schools<sup>7</sup>

✓ Student-to-school-counselor ratios approach 500:1, far exceeding best-practice guidance<sup>7</sup>

✓ The national ratio of school psychologists to students is roughly 1:1,182, nearly double the recommended levels<sup>7</sup>

✓ Nearly all states report shortages of special education teachers and related service personnel<sup>7</sup>

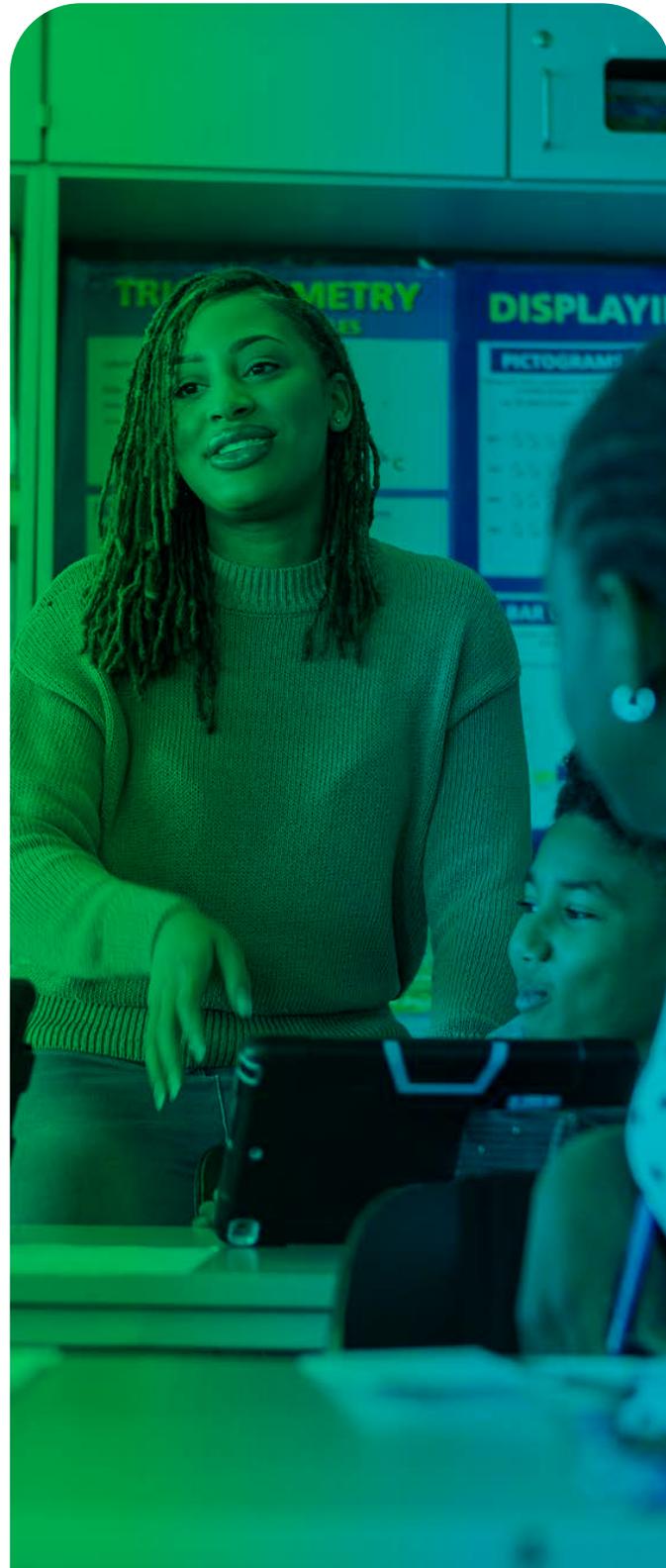
# The Cost of Waiting: When Gaps Compound

Service gaps can emerge suddenly, but rarely do. As vacancies persist and workloads shift, gaps develop incrementally, leaving districts at increased risk of legal escalation and safety concerns.

From the 2021-22 to the 2022-23 school year, special education **due process complaints jumped by 16.4%**.<sup>8</sup> In a 2023 school safety survey, **60% of K-12 school leaders** identified mental health issues as the most significant obstacle to school safety, and more than half reported feeling ill-equipped to address those challenges.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, research shows that poor mental health negatively affects student attendance and academic performance, reinforcing the urgency of timely intervention.<sup>2</sup>

Addressing gaps across all tiers **prevents avoidable escalation**, preserves internal capacity, and protects documentation integrity, allowing districts to maintain stability and promote student achievement.



# How Service Gaps Cascade Across Tiers

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) are designed as an integrated framework. When capacity breaks down at any level, pressure increases across the system.

## Tier I Visibility and Early Stability

Tier I establishes visibility into student needs and provides early intervention. When staffing constraints interrupt these supports, emerging concerns are identified later, documentation becomes inconsistent, and response timelines tighten under greater pressure.

**identified later > documentation inconsistent > response timeline tightens**

Tier I demonstrates proactive monitoring and timely action. When this layer erodes, districts lose early leverage and face increased strain downstream.

eLuma supports Tier I by helping districts screen students and **maintain continuity in hard-to-staff mental health and counseling services**, ensuring early supports do not pause while hiring continues. Our role is to stabilize coverage so districts can preserve visibility, documentation, and internal capacity.

### eLuma's Tier I support includes

- ✓ **Universal mental health screening**, including evidence-based tools to support consistent identification and defensible decision-making
- ✓ **Staff professional development**, focused on building schoolwide capacity and helping educators proactively support struggling students
- ✓ **Caregiver training and support**, reinforcing consistency and reducing breakdowns between home and school that can stall progress



When Tier I services remain stable, fewer students require escalation.

## Tier II Targeted Support Under Pressure

Tier II supports students who require targeted intervention. Staffing constraints at this level frequently lead to delays, allowing needs to intensify and increasing pressure on evaluation timelines and intensive services.

Delayed Tier II intervention weakens the ability to demonstrate timely, appropriate response before escalation. **When this layer falters, Tier III demand rises faster than districts can staff for it.**

### **Consequences for Tiers I & II (Universal and Targeted Supports) if gaps persist:**

- Early interventions are delayed or inconsistent
- Minor behavioral or academic issues escalate
- Student needs that could be addressed in lower tiers move into Tier III
- Increased strain on high-need staff and resources
- Continuity of support for all students breaks down

eLuma helps districts **augment capacity at Tier II when internal teams cannot keep pace**, allowing targeted services to begin on time and remain consistent throughout staffing transitions.

### **eLuma's Tier II support includes**

- ✓ **General education counseling services**, delivered individually or in small groups, to address emerging needs
- ✓ **Behavioral support services**, focused on skill development, behavior replacement strategies, and environmental adjustments
- ✓ **Consultation and collaboration** with educators and caregivers to align supports and reinforce progress
- ✓ **Monitoring and documenting progress**, supporting informed movement across tiers and defensible decisions



Maintaining Tier II continuity helps districts reduce unnecessary escalation, protect Tier III resources, and support internal staff sustainability.

## Tier III Compliance Critical Services

Tier III services carry the highest compliance exposure that districts manage. Demand typically rises because earlier supports couldn't be sustained.

Vacancies in counseling, psychology, speech-language therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy immediately affect IEP service delivery, evaluation timelines, and documentation requirements. Each week without coverage increases the likelihood of compensatory services, due process complaints, and regulatory scrutiny.

### **Consequences for Tier III (Intensive/High-Need Supports) if gaps persist:**

- IEP service minutes fall behind schedule
- Evaluation timelines are missed
- Compensatory services increase
- Documentation gaps emerge
- Staff burnout accelerates turnover
- Student progress stalls, creating compliance risk

**eLuma prevents Tier III service gaps** by providing licensed, credentialed clinicians who integrate into district service delivery models while hiring remains underway. When Tier III services remain stable, districts stay compliant, meet required timelines, and support consistent progress for students with the highest needs.

### **eLuma's Tier III support includes**

- ✓ **Counseling and behavioral support as IEP-related services**, executed by licensed mental health providers aligned to student goals and access to instruction
- ✓ **Speech-language therapy services**, delivered by licensed speech-language pathologists, including assessments and ongoing intervention
- ✓ **Occupational therapy services**, delivered by licensed occupational therapists, including assessments and ongoing intervention
- ✓ **Psychoeducational evaluations**, provided by licensed school psychologists, including assessments, written reports, and participation in eligibility and IEP meetings

# Speed With Accountability: A Distinctive Approach

Districts facing staffing shortages are often forced to choose between fast but transactional staffing support or compliant but slow internal hiring processes.

## **Speed with accountability means:**

- Rapid service initiation without compromising licensure standards
- Alignment with district tiered supports and IEP frameworks
- Consistent documentation and oversight
- Continuity through staffing transitions



## **When to Partner**

External staffing support is most effective when used intentionally. Districts should consider partnering when:

- Vacancies threaten service or evaluation timelines
- Backlogs begin to form
- Internal staff workloads become unsustainable
- Hiring pipelines cannot meet near-term demand

**“[eLuma providers] are consistent. They are reliable. They’re there when they say they’re going to be there.”**

*– Vonnie P., Special Education Director in Utah*

# Proof in Practice: What Stability Looks Like

Districts partnering with eLuma consistently report improved service continuity during periods of staffing disruption, including faster service initiation and sustained coverage during extended vacancies.<sup>11</sup> Districts that stabilize coverage early are better positioned to avoid compounding risk.

## Continuity Without Limits

Virtual service delivery allows districts to access qualified providers beyond local labor markets, begin services more quickly, and maintain continuity during staffing transitions.

**eLuma matches districts with the best provider to meet their specific needs, not just whoever is available.** This model removes long turnover recovery times and geographic constraints while preserving accountability and service quality.

## A Partner, Not a Replacement

eLuma is not a replacement for internal teams or a transactional staffing broker. Our role is focused on preventing service gaps when districts cannot afford disruption.

Districts partner with eLuma because of our experience operating under compliance scrutiny and our ability to integrate into existing systems with flexible solutions that expand and contract along with your current team's capacity.



**“Whenever we face staffing challenges, eLuma quickly gets onboarded and navigates our schedules and systems, ensuring students don't miss services.”**

- Aimee B.,  
Assistant Director of Special Education in  
Minnesota<sup>11</sup>

# Moving Forward: Preventing Gaps Before They Escalate

**Service gaps often develop quietly before becoming visible.**

**District leaders can begin by asking:**

- ✓ Are service or evaluation timelines slipping?
- ✓ Are staff absorbing work intended for vacant roles?
- ✓ Are Tier II and Tier III demands increasing faster than capacity?

**If so, gaps may already be forming.**

**Explore how eLuma helps districts prevent service gaps in mental health, special education, and related services before compliance, continuity, and student progress are at risk.**

**“In my opinion, going with eLuma is a no-brainer! Their therapists have provided high-quality services.”**

*- Lena K., Executive Director in Kansas<sup>11</sup>*

**Learn more at [eluma.com](https://eluma.com) to see how it works.**

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