

# Dane County: To increase mental health staffing, supports at local schools

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Dane County will provide local schools \$1.5 million in additional dollars to help meet the increasing behavioral health needs of K-12 kids, County Executive Joe Parisi announced today. The funds will help schools add staff and resources to support the work of teachers, young people, and their families.

“Behavioral health needs continue to be one of the most pervasive challenges facing families,” Parisi said. “We know these needs have only been exacerbated by the pandemic and the challenging events of the past couple of years. That’s why it’s important for the county, schools, and families to come together to explore ways that we can do more, together.”

The program will provide mental health or substance use treatment services (individual or group treatment) within school buildings and/or via telehealth platforms, or specific outreach to students not yet engaged in mental health or substance use treatment. Mental health or substance use treatment modalities will be delivered by persons trained and credentialed to provide the service, be evidenced-informed and time limited. Potential vendors may elect to offer treatment services, outreach services, or both.

The county will be seeking proposals from local school districts in the coming weeks on the best ways to allocate the \$1.5 million, with the goal of having dollars awarded in time to hire staff when school is back in session this fall. The new dollars will be available for the next couple of years to provide the new staff an ability to

build relationships with the young people they're looking to support. These funds were authorized by the County Executive and County Board in adoption of the 2022 Dane County budget. School districts can begin to submit proposals to the county starting later this week.

The need for mental health and substance use services for children and youth has increased substantially in recent years and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The [2021 Dane County Youth Assessment data](#) shows increased rates of anxiety, depression, suicidality, and self-harm amongst Dane County middle and high school age youth, and in December 2021 the US Surgeon General issued an [advisory](#) to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis.

This new county funding is in addition to Dane County's popular "Building Bridges" school-based mental health program. Created by the County Executive in 2013, this innovative mental health initiative works daily in ten Dane County school districts. Behavioral health professionals offer direct case management with school aged children and their families, providing in-school resources to help overcome anxiety and other mental health barriers to learning. Dane County allocates over \$1.1 million in local tax dollars for this program each year.

Once the county evaluates proposals from local school districts, a resolution will be introduced to the County Board later this summer to effectuate awarding the dollars in time for the fall semester.