

# Stabilize School-Based Behavioral Health Services in Every School

Fair Budget Coalition in Collaboration with the DC Behavioral Health Association

## Recommendation

A total of \$8.2 million: \$103,000 for one Community-Based Organization grant-funded clinician per school for 253 schools to maintain level funding with \$99,371 Department of Behavioral Health-provided FY '23 grants plus a 3.6% inflationary adjustment.

The recommendation seeks to stabilize the services now available in schools, by covering the funding gap that exists between what the Department of Behavioral Health has budgeted and what is actually needed for the cost of mental health clinicians in DC public and public charter schools.

## What Is It?

The South Capitol Street Memorial Amendment Act of 2012 required the DC Mayor to develop a plan to establish and expand school-based behavioral health programs and services for public and public charter school students by school year 2016-2017. School-based behavioral health services are mental health services that get to the root of the emotional and behavioral health challenges that students face. The school-based behavioral health service program focuses on promoting “social and emotional competency in all students.”

School-based behavioral health services support improving the schools’ acceptance of mental health as a key component in educational success, improving classroom environments, reducing the time needed to respond to mental health crises, and addressing the experiences of trauma that remain far too common for Black and Brown children and adolescents. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that these services can help reduce absenteeism and lead to better mental health outcomes.

School-based behavioral health services are increasing in schools across the nation. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 96% of schools offered some mental health services to students including one-on-one counseling, coordination of mental health services, or referrals for care. However, only 34% of schools had funding to provide outreach services such as mental health screenings to detect potential or existing mental health conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges including social isolation and irregular routines which can have negative impacts on children. A Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that more than 30% of families reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their child’s mental health.

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## What's At Stake?

Right now, there is a gap between the cost of mental health clinicians and existing funding, and closing the gap will ensure that approximately 92,000 students have access to behavioral health services through their schools. Onsite clinicians in schools increase access to mental health services in the place where most children spend most of their time during the school year. As children are coping with the implications of the pandemic and the new normal, it is critical that they are supported in their mental and emotional growth.



### Citations

- DC Department of Behavioral Health, Guide to Comprehensive School Behavioral Health, [https://dbh.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmh/page\\_content/attachments/PRIMARY%20GUIDE\\_SCHOOL%20BEHAVIORAL%20HEALTH\\_JUNE%202019.pdf](https://dbh.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmh/page_content/attachments/PRIMARY%20GUIDE_SCHOOL%20BEHAVIORAL%20HEALTH_JUNE%202019.pdf), 2019.
- Kaiser Family Foundation, Headed Back to School: A Look at the Ongoing Effects of COVID-19 on Children's Health and Well-Being, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/headed-back-to-school-a-look-at-the-ongoing-effects-of-covid-19-on-childrens-health-and-well-being/#:~:text=The%20pandemic%20may%20have%20worsened,mental%20health%20later%20in%20life,2022>.
- Welsey Family Services, School Based Behavioral Health Services (SBBH), <https://wfspa.org/service/school-based-behavioral-health-services-sbbh/>, n.d.