



Alternative Community Resources Program

Beacon Light Behavioral Health Services

Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural PA

Bell Socialization Services, Inc.

Blair County Department of Social Services

Bucks County Behavioral Health

Carelon Health of PA

CCRN Behavioral Supports

Cenclear

Chester County Respite Network

Chestnut Ridge Counseling Services

Children's Service Center

Chimes Holcomb

Community Behavioral Health

Community Guidance Center

Community Services Group, Inc.

Conference of Allegheny Providers

County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Deveraux

Goodwill Keystone Area

Human Resources Center

School-Based Mental Health Funding: Pathways to Partnership

Governor Shapiro has made student mental health a priority, investing nearly \$400 million in school mental health and school safety since January 2023. The proposed 2026/27 budget includes a continued investment of \$111 million for school safety and mental health supports, with \$100 million of these funds allocated through the Pennsylvania Commission of Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) as a non-competitive grant.

The student mental health crisis is real, with nearly 4 out of every 10 students (38.5%) reporting some level of mental health need¹. Common issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout often lead to poor academic performance, low motivation, and high truancy rates. Student mental health continues to be the largest instructional challenge in schools, with more than 80% of school districts reporting that a shortage of qualified mental health care providers is the biggest challenge in connecting students to the care they deserve. Despite significant investments, why can students not access the mental health care they need to thrive?

- Lack of Mental Health Professionals:** There is a mental health workforce shortage nationwide, and there are simply not enough mental health professionals to staff a school mental health system and a community mental health system. The creation of a secondary mental health system in the schools, though unintentional, detracts from the workforce of the longstanding community mental health system. Partnerships with counties and existing community mental health providers would ease the workforce constraints, allowing students to connect with mental health care.
- Inequitable Use of Funding:** In accordance with the PCCD grant, school entities may use the funds for physical safety, student mental health, or a combination of the two at their discretion. Unfortunately, this discretionary spending has resulted in the majority of the funds being utilized for school safety concerns rather than student mental health. Although school safety is paramount, school entities should not have to choose between the safety and mental well-being of their students.
- Funding Constraints:** School entities are required to utilize the PCCD funds to fulfill all Level 1 Baseline Criteria for behavioral health and school climate before qualifying to expend the funding for other acceptable activities. This means that school entities cannot coordinate or integrate local and county mental health services and programs. The Level 1 criteria begin to build a secondary mental health system in the school before the school entity even has the option to utilize these funds for partnership with community providers.

¹ [Pennsylvania School Board Association's 2026 State of Education](#)

Human Services Center
KidsPeace
MAX Association
Mental Health America of Southwest PA
Mental Health Partnerships
Montgomery County Human Services
Partners for Quality
Philadelphia Mental Health Care Corporation – Family Training and Advocacy Center
Step by Step, Inc.
Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association
Saint Luke’s Penn Foundation
Strawberry Fields, Inc.
Staunton Farms Foundation
The Advocacy Alliance
The Alliance of Philadelphia Providers
The Bradley Center
TrueNorth Wellness Services
Wellspan
Westmoreland Case Management

Pennsylvania lawmakers have made the commitment to fund children’s mental health in our schools, but now it is time to maximize this investment:

1. Form a coalition of stakeholders, including counties, the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, HealthChoices, and providers to construct a blueprint for a continuum of care.
2. Invest funding into the mandated yet underutilized Student Assistance Programs (SAP) through meaningful partnerships with districts, counties, and providers as the first line of defense to addressing student mental health.
3. Expand PCCD Level 1 Behavioral Health Baseline Criteria to allow for coordination between community-based and school-based mental health services to avoid building a secondary mental health system and allow for the sustainable delivery of mental health services in our schools.

Never before have we been able to fund and act so decisively. Now is the time to invest in the wellbeing of the Commonwealth’s vulnerable youth.

Please [contact Emma Sharp](#) with any questions.

Sincerely,

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition