

News Release

Oakland County announces new \$15 million program to address student mental health needs

County leaders and school officials announce program to address students' social and emotional needs

June 22, 2022, OAKLAND COUNTY, MI. – This afternoon, county and school officials announced the launch of the Oakland County Schools Mental Health Grant Program. The program will provide grants to local public school districts to address students' mental health needs, and it allows school districts to create social and emotional programs specific to the needs of their unique communities. The \$15 million initiative will be funded with up to \$10,150,000 of the county's American Rescue Plan Act funds and matched with up to \$5 million from local school districts.

"Addressing mental health needs of students is a public health issue as much as it is an education issue," said Oakland County Board of Commissioners Chairman **David T. Woodward** (D-Royal Oak). "This is the biggest county-school partnership in the state to improve the mental health of our students across Oakland County."

The creation of this initiative was led by Commissioner **Penny Luebs** (D-Clawson), who chairs the Board's Public Health & Safety Committee, and it has earned broad bipartisan support through the committee review process.

"We have been working on this program for several months to make sure it is the best way for the County to support school districts," Luebs said. "When mental health issues are addressed, students have a better chance to learn and handle life challenges, and I am confident that this program will enable schools to help many Oakland County children."

Public school districts in Oakland County will be invited to submit a proposal for grant funding for initiatives that may include additional school mental health professional staff, training to increase the capacity to identify students in need of mental health intervention services, programming to address the social and emotional needs of students, or increased capacity for school-based mental health screenings and/or assessments of students.

“This grant program initiated by Oakland County will provide flexibility for the local school districts like Royal Oak to build a sustainable plan that meets the unique needs of our community,” Royal Oak Schools Superintendent Mary Beth Fitzpatrick said. “We are excited to expand the opportunities to help meet our students' social and emotional needs by providing training and resources as part of a multi-year plan. We appreciate that the County prioritizes this ongoing need to support our children in the schools and is committed to helping with the funding.”

The grant program will provide eligible Oakland County school districts with a base grant up to \$175,000. Additional grant funding up to \$175,000 will be awarded if matched with equal funds from the school district.

“There is such a great need for mental health services in our schools today because our students continue to struggle with the long-term effects of learning loss and social isolation caused by COVID,” said Deputy County Executive Sean Carlson, who also is the president of the Huron Valley Board of Education. “We’re grateful for the partnership between the administration and the Oakland County Board of Commissioners that is working together to provide these resources for our students.”

According to Oakland Schools, the county’s intermediate school district, one in 10 students has serious mental health problems severe enough to impair how they function in school, home or the community. Additionally, the rates of suspension and expulsion for elementary students with severe mental health problems are three times higher than their peers.

"Our students and staff are survivors of an incredibly stressful two years," said Clawson School Board Trustee Cyndi Peltonen. "With this grant, we will explore ways we can bolster our support systems. One idea we're looking at in Clawson is a Therapy Dog Program to improve student and staff well-being. Research shows these programs can help reduce anxiety and depression, and even bolster academic achievement."

Social and emotional programs help students develop skills that last a lifetime. In the short term, the positive impacts include the development of social and emotional skills gains in academic achievement; meaningful connections with educators and peers; improved attitudes toward self, school and others; positive social behavior; and fewer behavior incidents.

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