

# BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D.  
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FROM: Patricia Mustipher, Director of Student Support Services  
Courtney Brown, Supervisor of Mental Health Services

DATE: June 16, 2022

SUBJECT: Final Report on Mental Health Advisory Council

**Sponsoring Chief:** Dr. Mary Boswell-McComas, Chief Academic Officer

**Meeting Facilitators/Organizers:** Courtney Brown, Supervisor of Mental Health Services  
Patricia Mustipher, Director of Student Support Services

## **Team Members (central office and school-based):**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Agency/Role</b>
Kim Ferguson	BCPS – Executive Director of Social Emotional Supports
April Lewis	BCPS - Executive Director of School Safety
Patricia Mustipher	BCPS – Director of Student Support Services
Joquetta Johnson	BCPS – Office of Equity
MaatenRe Ramin Jennifer Abbe	BCPS-School Counseling Services
Dr. Aaron Wheeler Joan Parr	BCPS-School Psychological Services
Dr. Kevin Roberts	BCPS – Pupil Personnel Services
Deb Somerville	BCPS – Health Services
Courtney Brown	BCPS – Mental Health Supervisor
Niamh McQuillan Clare Kruft	BCPS – Organizational Effectiveness
Andrea Derrien	BCPS – Chatsworth Principal
Seth Barish	BCPS – Ridgely Principal
Sue Hahn	BCPS Parent University
LaShawn Matthews	BCPS Parent
Christian Thomas	BCPS Student Member of the Board
Caroline Weigel	BCPS Student Leadership Committee Chair
Kianna Victor Annika Vanlandingham	BCPS Students and members of a student organization called DMV Students for Mental Health Reform
Janice Zimmerman	BCPS EAP

Joshua Grubka	TABCO Representative
Sheila Harte-Dmitriev	CASE Representative
Lee Ohnmacht Heather Dewey Ari Blum	Local Behavioral Health Authority Bureau of Behavioral Health
Toni Mayes Susan Loysen	Baltimore County DSS
Allison Paladino	Affiliated Sante Group/Baltimore County Crisis Response (Mobile Crisis)
Lieutenant Bryan Shanks	Baltimore County Police Department – Behavioral Assessment Unit
Keeley Thomas	Thrive Behavioral Health
Sarah Ardnt	National Alliance for Mental Illness - NAMI
Kathrin Olbrich Michelle Vorpahl	American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - Maryland

**Mental Health Advisory Council Purpose:**

The purpose of the advisory group, comprised of both internal and external stakeholders, is to promote and advocate for a comprehensive school mental health program within BCPS.

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction, Background/Context Information**

The Mental Health Advisory Council was an outgrowth of a proposal on behalf of the Office of School Climate, School Social Work Services to increase awareness in support towards promoting social and emotional wellness and meeting the mental and behavioral health needs across BCPS. The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 mandated that by September 1, 2018, each local school system appoint a mental health services coordinator to coordinate existing mental health services and referral procedures within the local school system. Working with specified local entities, the coordinator responsibilities include the following:

- (1) ensure that a student who is referred for mental health services obtains the necessary services;
- (2) maximize external funding for mental health and wraparound services, as defined by the bill; and
- (3) develop plans for delivering behavioral health and wraparound services to students who exhibit specified behaviors of concern.

Nationally, mental health statistics indicated that 1 in 5 U.S. children met criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder (Child Mind Institute, 2015) and 50% of mental disorders begin before age 14 with 70% before the age of 18 years of age (WHO, 2019). The directives of legislation combined with the student mental health facts brought about the importance of awareness of the educator and school personnel to prompt consideration for systemic vision and support of the council. Additionally, the promotion of mental health and well-being combined with identification and mobilization of responses to emerging mental health needs of students has supported the establishment of the Mental Health Advisory Council in November 2020.

**Purpose:** Establish a mental health advisory council that will work to a promote and advocate for a comprehensive school mental health program within BCPS

- that offers a continuum of mental health supports and services that promotes a positive school climate, social emotional learning, mental health and wellness that is culturally responsive and comprehensive.

- that builds on a strong foundation of school system professionals, including administrators, educators, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., School Social Workers, School Psychologists, School Counselors, School Nurses, and other school health professionals) in strategic partnership with students, families, and community health and mental health partners.

Increasingly, educators recognize the opportunities to promote student well-being and to identify and address mental health concerns experienced by their students. When protective and positive mental health skills are promoted and mental health concerns are addressed, student learning at the individual and classroom level increases. National statistics indicate suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for people ages 10-34 years and research is suggesting an increase in youth/adolescents experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression during this period which includes a pandemic, social unrest, time of political divisiveness, and incidents of mass violence.

As we continue to recognize the need to support mental wellness and provide supports and services to address the social emotional wellness and mental health needs of students, the need to develop a Mental Health Advisory Council comprised of BCPS and Baltimore County stakeholders was critical.

The provision of Mental Health Services aligns to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that is a continuum of prevention and intervention services and support resources that available to students at all levels. The identification of services and supports are based on data, using evidenced-based practices, in a manner that ensures equitable outcomes that are culturally responsive in a multi-disciplinary team process. The tiers layer on each other to advance meeting student needs. Those offices that offer services via the MTSS framework (Department of Social Emotional Supports and Student Support Services) as well as the Department of School Safety, Office of Equity, EAP, the Bargaining Units (TABCO and CASE), as well as school-based administrators were asked to be part of this council as well as our community mental health partners including the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Department of Social Services (DSS), Local Behavioral Health Authority Bureau of Behavioral Health, and Baltimore County Crisis Response (Mobile Crisis).

## **Overview of Current Work**

### **Council Meetings:**

- September 15, 2021
- November 17, 2021
- January 19, 2022
- March 16, 2022
- May 18, 2022

The focus of the first meeting on September 15, 2021, was to provide an update for the Design Thinking Workgroup, review the action steps identified from the May 2021 meeting, and identify areas of focus for MHAC for the 2021-2022 school year (i.e., data, professional learning, reducing stigma, and access to mental health treatment). There were some commonalities in the Design Thinking Workgroup outcomes as well as the recommendations from last year's MHAC meetings. These included:

- The need for connection and relationship and to be able to have a safe space to discuss mental health and wellness.
- Education/communication about the supports and services available to all students and those with greater needs.

- SEL and mental health resources available to students, staff, and parents.
- A need to capture SEL data systemwide – for students, parents, and staff.

The second meeting on November 17, 2021, involved presentations from Samirah Abdul-Fattah, GBRICS Community Engagement Coordinator, and Heather Dewey, Suicide Prevention Coordinator with the Baltimore County Bureau of Behavioral Health. Both Ms. Abdul-Fattah and Ms. Dewey discussed current services, initiatives, and noted behavioral health trends noted by the given agency. The group then engaged in an activity in breakout groups discussing how they see BCPS partnering in this work and how they see this work impacting students and families. Some comments included:

How they see BCPS partnering in this work:

- Behavioral Health featuring weekly/monthly to support information sharing with communities.
- Provide resources/information that is accessible and explicit for the lay reader

How they see this work impacting students and families:

- Parents/caregivers need access to information that is user friendly.
- Provide resources to community schools as they become more prevalent to support wrap around services.
- If families providing kinship care or foster care had access to resources/supports, they may be able to sustain the child with various needs in their home for a longer period.
- GBRICS is providing more crisis response services with the expansion of care.

The third meeting was held on January 19, 2022. The council reviewed the content and feedback from the previous council meeting and then engaged in further discussion to get more information about how BCPS identifies the most accessible location for parents, students, and staff to access mental health/substance abuse resources and soliciting feedback on effectiveness. The group discussions led to the possible resources to include (Maryland Coalition of Families, Mary's Center, Baltimore County Crisis Response, NAMI, 211, the Crisis Text Line, specialized resources for students who identify as LGBTQ+). Ideas for the most accessible locations for the information were in staff's email signatures, nurses' offices, counseling offices, posters/flyers in bathrooms (for those who aren't comfortable reaching out to staff for support), public libraries, Schoology, linked to the BCPS calendar, using a QR code to post in designated locations, and school websites. With regards to how BCPS could gather feedback as a system as to what is or is not working, the council offered the following suggestions: a feedback drop box, intake coordinators, help email accounts, analyze how easy our information is to access in BCPS (on website and other vehicles), and coordinate with NAMI and BCPS for analytics of accessing information sites and collect feedback for live events or for written feedback.

For the March 16, 2022, meeting, the council collaborated with BCPS EAP and the Baltimore County Bureau of Behavioral Health on a presentation on the Status of Student and Staff Mental Health, looking at both national and local data/trends as well as mental health resources within BCPS and in the community. The mental health trends for both students and staff align to national trends per the data. It was acknowledged that the pandemic has exacerbated mental health symptoms for both students and staff. Following the presentation, small groups engaged in discussions about what members were noticing, feeling, wondering, or thinking and what could be some possible next steps for the group. Comments included:

- I'm feeling overwhelmed with concern about our students.

- Overall concerned about the acuity of calls to the crisis center.
- There's an overwhelming demand of our clinical and support staff.
- Concerned about getting information into the hands of teachers and families in an organized way.
- Any resources for staff to support their own resilience and care of self? How are we instilling hope?

Identified possible next steps were:

- Planning proactively
- Resource identification through resource mapping
- Have consistent posters about hotlines and resources posted in BCPS schools and public buildings.
- Supporting families and communities. Think about collaboration to include parents and families in the work (information sharing).
- What supports are being used in schools? Is there consistency? Is "Handle with Care" being used?

The final meeting held on May 18, 2022, involved an overview of the year's meetings including content and feedback/ideas from discussions, highlights of various mental health initiatives and events held throughout the year, and discussion by members to identify recommendations that can be offered as well as priorities for the 2022-2023 school year.

## **Key Findings**

While several council members were aware of the MTSS Framework and the services and supports offered within BCPS, many were not. There were also several areas of interest that council members were curious about, specifically current mental health supports for students and how does the variability across schools, the measurement of success of the interventions in each tier, understanding the gaps in services, equitable and accessible supports and services, and what determinants inform professional learning.

## **Implications & Next Steps**

Recommended Action Steps for 2022-2023:

- Design posters/visuals/QR code to website that provide resources for students and staff
- Provide more information to families (resources, hotlines, etc.)
- Help families understand how schools and school personnel can support their children (and our students) i.e., community partnerships for mental health treatment.
- Provide more information to staff about Handle with Care and other initiatives.
- Move MHAC meetings to earlier in the day

Suggested Priorities for 2022-2023

- Continue to enhance understanding and supporting implementation of a comprehensive school mental health program that is innovative, effective, and culturally and linguistically competent in alignment with the three tiers of mental health programming (promotion, prevention, intervention).
- Continue to identify sources of funding especially for our families who are under-insured and uninsured.
- Examine workforce needs.
- Examine available resources and share with schools and families.

**List of the Mental Health Advisory Council Documents presented:**

MHAC Meeting September 15, 2021

- [Agenda](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

MHAC Meeting November 17, 2021

- [Agenda](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

MHAC Meeting January 19, 2022

- [Agenda](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

MHAC Meeting March 16, 2022

- [Agenda](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

MHAC May 18, 2022

- [Agenda](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)

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