School Mental Health Quality Guide: Funding and Sustainability is part of a collection of resources developed by the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine for The SHAPE System. The Quality Guides provide guidance to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports. This guide contains background information on funding and sustainability, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.

Recommended APA reference
National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH, 2020). School Mental Health Quality Guide: Funding and Sustainability. NCSMH, University of Maryland School of Medicine.
School Mental Health Funding and Sustainability

School mental health funding and sustainability refers to strategies that optimize the financial and nonfinancial assets needed to maintain and improve school mental health systems.

In order to maintain long-term programming, school mental health systems rely on reliable funding to cover costs. Because funding streams are regularly changing, states, districts, and schools must develop strategies that account for economic and political shifts.

In addition to reliable funding, comprehensive school mental health systems must also focus on other components of sustainability, ensuring that operational structures are sound, and that the system can respond to the changing needs of students, families, schools, communities, and other systems.

Use multiple and diverse funding resources to support a continuum of care

Best Practices

✓ Use multiple and diverse funding sources from different levels, types of funding, and different systems.

✓ School mental health systems should use funding from different levels, leveraging funds at the school level to the federal level. With that, there should also be a variety of types of funding from grants, private foundations, third party reimbursement, among others. Funding should also come from different systems including: education; physical, mental, and public health; substance use; child welfare; juvenile services.

✓ Below is a description of the different funding levels/categories (federal, state, local, private foundation).

Resource: A Guide to Federal Education Program that Can Fund K-12 Universal Prevention and Social Emotional Learning Activities is intended to help districts become more aware of and take advantage of federal education funds to implement prevention efforts in elementary and secondary schools.

Resource: Accessing Medicaid Funding for School-Based Mental Health Services is an issue brief that provides schools, districts, and education agencies with strategies to access and utilize Medicaid funds to support mental health services in schools.
Federal Funding

**Block grants:**
Federal block grants are allocated to states based on demographic characteristics. Within broad categories of allowed use, states determine how to allocate and use the funding.

Examples of block grants used to fund comprehensive school mental health services include: Title V Maternal and Child Health, Title XI funds for disadvantaged youth, Title XX Social Services, and the Preventive Health and Health Services block grant.

**Project/Discretionary Grants:**
Project grants are awarded through a competitive process and provide funding for specific projects for a predetermined period of time.

Examples of project grants include: Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (AWARE), Project Prevent, and the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative.

**Legislative Earmarks:**
Legislative earmarks refer to provisions that allocate a certain amount of money for a specific project or initiative for a limited time period.

Example: reserving part of an annual budget for addressing school safety.

**Direct Payments/ Fee-for-Service (Medicaid):**
Federal assistance for eligible students is provided for fee-for-service.

Example: to support services such as therapy for students with clinical diagnoses.
Tips

Five Medicaid Dimensions to Support School Mental Health

- Maximize enrollment of eligible children
  - Assist with enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP
- Expand services and support
  - For example: teacher consultations, case management, prevention approaches
- Expand provider types
  - For example: parent support partners, graduate trainees
- Use cross-system strategies to optimize funding
  - Braided and blended funding, case rate approaches
- Improvement of reimbursement methods
  - Fee-for-service, pre-paid capitation, case rate

State Support

State Taxes:
In some states, taxes from a variety of sources such as tobacco and casinos can be allocated to fund school mental health and education. For example, in Colorado, 12.59% of tax revenue from marijuana sales is credited to the State Public School Fund and distributed across all school districts in the state.

State Grants:
Grants provided by the state to fund mental health service provision, which can include school mental health services. For example, the Minnesota Department of Human Services recently disbursed 33 million dollars of state grant funding support mental health services in schools.

Children’s Health Insurance Program:
CHIP provides insurance for children from low-income households. CHIP coverage can be used to support assessment and treatment services for youth with mental health challenges.

State Budget:
Some states dedicate a line item in their budget for mental health services that can be accessed to help fund school mental health services. For example, in a budget approved in April 2019, New York directed $500,000 to the School Mental Health Resource & Training Center.

State agencies
- Understand options within Medicaid regulations
- Collaborate with the Department of Health/Mental Health/Behavioral Health to revise Medicaid services if needed to support improved access and quality of care to children and adolescents
- Help to ensure that youth and families can access needed services and supports
- Use data to make informed decisions related to school mental health

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**Principal Discretionary Dollars:**

Discretionary dollars refer to non-earmarked funds that a principal can allocate as they see appropriate.

**Parent Teacher Association Funding:**

Funds from the Parent Teacher Association are another form of discretionary dollars that can be allocated to school mental health efforts.

**School Districts:**

School districts can allocate a portion of their budget for school mental health funding.

**Community Coalitions:**

Community Coalitions are typically formed by local businesses and private foundations who partner together to donate or raise (via fundraisers) money to fund school mental health.

**School-Level Support**

**Private Support**

**Foundations:**

This funding tends to be more flexible and comes from private foundations. Foundations may provide funding for pilot projects or mental health prevention and/or promotion activities. For example, in 2017, the Bainum Family Foundation launched their School Mental Health Initiative and awarded 4.1 million dollars to expand school mental health services in Wards 7 and 8 of Washington, DC, areas with high poverty rates.

**Coordinate funding streams**

**Best Practices**

- Because it can be challenging to rely on a single source of funding for school mental health services and supports, programs should strategically identify and use multiple funding streams.
  - Two common strategies to combine multiple funding sources are braided funding and blended funding.
  - Braided occurs when various agencies pool and coordinate resources to provide needed services while maintaining the integrity of each agency’s funding stream.
  - Blended occurs when separate agencies contribute to a common pool or co-mingle funds into a single source from which agreed service goals are purchased.

- Identify funds from the school, local, state, and federal level that are being used to support your comprehensive school mental health system. Bring together diverse agencies and organizations to strategize about opportunities for braiding funding to meet larger system goals connected to school mental health services and supports.
State Example: Pennsylvania, a state with a long history of success in advancing comprehensive school mental health at the state and district level, has used braided funding to support its school mental health services and supports.

- Medicaid, CHIP, and private insurance for behavioral health treatment services
- Mental health and drug and alcohol allocations to counties to provide liaison services to Student Assistance Program (SAP) teams in all 500 school districts
- Education system for the training of SAP or Positive Behavior Support (PA PBS) team members or Youth Mental Health First Aid training
- Drug and alcohol funding to counties to provide evidence-based prevention services to schools
- 10% funding from foundations and other grants

District Example: An urban district in Maryland successfully built a model that pools and leverages funding from multiple sources, often referred to as blended funding, to support community-partnered school mental health providers in most schools.

- ~55% funding from fee-for-service (Medicaid, private insurance) reimbursement
- 35% funding from city taxes, school district funds, and specific line items in the municipal budget
- 10% funding from foundations and other grants
**Ensure funding and resources align to support a full continuum of care**

**Best Practices**

- Through the process of selecting funding and resources, schools and districts should consider each Tier to support a full continuum of services.
- Some funding mechanisms may only provide money for services at one or two Tiers. For example, Medicaid is typically used for reimbursement for Tier 3 services, like individual therapy.
- Begin by mapping out available Tier 1, 2, and 3 services and supports that are currently available to students and families.
- Outline the source and amount of funding, restrictions on use, and expected time frame for funding availability. Doing this exercise will help teams identify gaps in services and supports and provides structure to outline a long-term plan.
- After identifying resource/funding strengths and gaps at each Tier, work with your team to brainstorm options for strengthening services and supports.
- Consider the following Sustainability Strategies for Tier 1, 2, and 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use seed dollars to support Tier 1 (state, district, and community partners)</td>
<td>• Use Student Support Teams to efficiently triage student at risk for mental health concerns to school and community supports</td>
<td>• Developing MOUs between school districts and mental/behavioral health providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide school-wide evidence-based programs (EBPs)</td>
<td>• Mental health staff provide prevention group activities based on identified needs</td>
<td>• How to maximize current reimbursement mechanisms</td>
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<td>• Integrate EBPs into school curriculum</td>
<td>• Provide in-school and/or after-school small group prevention groups through community partners</td>
<td>• Having clear referral and communication strategies to collaborate with community providers</td>
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<td>• Provide annual booster EBP trainings for staff</td>
<td>• Seek funding for prevention activities through collaborative partnerships with entities such as community programs, hospitals, private foundations, and businesses</td>
<td>• Promote public and private partnerships to increase funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide cross-training among school staff and community partners</td>
<td>• Use county tax revenue to pay for prevention programs</td>
<td>• Integrate training of advanced graduate students into the program to enhance service provision and workforce development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Partner with community organizations to provide EBPs</td>
<td>• Develop MOAs and/or contracts with community organizations</td>
<td>• School staff provide intervention groups related to pressing needs within the school (e.g., trauma, anxiety)</td>
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</tbody>
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**Resource:** [“Sample Resource Mapping Worksheet”](#)
Establish a process to develop, evaluate, and update your financing plan

Best Practices

Important areas to assist systems/sites to develop comprehensive and strategic financing plans for building effective systems of care:

- Identification of current spending and utilization patterns across agencies
- Realignment of funding streams and structures
- Financing of appropriate services and supports
- Financing to support family and youth partnerships
- Financing to improve cultural/linguistic competence and reduce disproportionality in care
- Financing for accountability
- Financing to improve the workforce and provider network for behavioral health services for children and families

Federal Funding

- Register to receive regular federal funding announcements from 26 federal agencies through grants.gov. The Grants Learning Center provides steps to registering, as well as other helpful information including grant eligibility, grant policies, and grant terms.
- Brainstorm a list of relevant federal agencies to follow (e.g., Department of Education, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Institute of Justice).
- Tip: Some agency websites allow individuals to receive agency-specific funding announcements. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) frequently issues announcements for Request for Applications (RFAs) through their listserv.

State Funding

- Develop a list of state-level agencies to regularly follow for grant opportunities, including the Department of Behavioral Health, Public Health, Mental Health, and Health.
- Tip: Listings for state funded grant opportunities varies by state. While some states list grant opportunities on a Governor’s website, others post on the official state website. States may also list grant opportunities through state agency websites. Look for grant opportunity listservs and sign up to receive regular updates. If you cannot find grant listings, contact your governor’s website and ask where to look.

Other Funding Opportunities

- Identify private foundations that would be interested in efforts to improve and grow school mental health services and supports such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- The Grantsmanship Center’s State Grant Resources includes a mapping tool that provides state-specific information about the top grantmaking foundations and community foundations, as well as links to state government homepages.
- The Foundation Center is a leading source on philanthropy worldwide and is supported by more than 550 foundations. They have five regional library/learning centers (New York, Washington DC, Atlanta, Cleveland and San Francisco) and also maintain an online database of the more than 100,000 foundations, corporate donors, and grantmaking public charities. However, searching the directory requires a subscription, the most basic of which costs $19.95/month.
- The United Way is another great resource to assist in your search for funding opportunities. Your local United Way can help connect you to other agencies and/or initiatives going on in your community to address these issues.
Leverage funding and resources to attract potential contributors

Best Practices

- Establish and use an agreement that specifies funding and resources
- Regularly seek partners with funding or non-financial resources to contribute
- Establish and foster relationships with diverse agencies and organizations

**Resource:** Consider developing key points to share about your school mental health program when working to develop and establish relationships. Use this as a guide.

**Resource:** Leading by Convening provides suggestions for ensuring the right mix of stakeholders are identified and are participating.

**Resource:** An example Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can help your team develop MOUs that are clear and thoroughly document agreements.

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**action steps**

**Acquiring Funding**

- Conduct a comprehensive scan of existing funding opportunities available at the school, local, state, and federal levels.
- Establish partnerships with outpatient hospital and community behavioral health programs and other agencies and organizations to expand available services to students and leverage existing funding resources and infrastructure.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly documents agreed upon services (e.g., the local department of education agrees to commit funds to support x FTE in schools by a particular program in return for the local department of health providing professional development related to x school-based staff).
- Think beyond dollars and consider exchanging services, such as professional development and training. For example, if one group is very skilled at providing training on a given evidence-based program or practice, instead of the school or the community partner having to purchase that, they can exchange that service as a way of sharing funding expenses.
Provide in-person and virtual ongoing professional development activities such as lectures, didactic presentations, and peer consultation
  • Ask for staff input on presentation topics
  • Create and distribute a Professional Development calendar with topics and dates
  • Hand out a feedback form at the end of each session to evaluate (can be just a blank piece of paper for writing “glows” and “grows”)

Regularly recognize and celebrate accomplishments (e.g., monthly awards, recognition, sharing success stories with others) and personal milestones (e.g., birth of a child, birthdays)
  • Put up a large monthly calendar in the break room that includes staff birthdays and special events (e.g., Teacher Appreciation Week)
  • Turn a bulletin board into a place where staff can write “shout-outs” to/for one another

Practice open, bidirectional communication and provide opportunities for staff to provide anonymous input if desired

Offer flexible work schedules and consider telecommuting opportunities
  • Consider adopting job sharing practices
  • Have allotted “flex-days” on certain Professional Development days where staff can work on tasks whenever from wherever as long as they meet the deadline

Provide and evaluate staff wellness activities
  • Partner with a local massage school to set up in the teachers lounge for a day offering 10-minute massages to help them earn their hours for licensure
  • Have staff complete a survey that includes their favorite snacks and music

Engage staff to provide input on how to optimize staff retention
  • Include opportunities for input in annual goal-setting meetings
  • Conduct focus groups or add a question to a survey

Provide supervision and opportunities for peer support (e.g., new hire mentor, new hire supervision and support group, buddy program)
  • Create professional learning communities for your staff and allot time during professional development days
  • Match staff with mentors based on their professional goals

Provide opportunities for career advancement
  • Encourage staff to voice ideas and desires for leadership roles
  • Have administrators work with staff to create goals and an individualized action plans to build skills needed for their desired advancements
  • Announce all new posted positions in staff newsletter or email to increase internal awareness of job opportunities

Provide incentive-based pay
  • Look into districts that have adopted incentive-based pay and see how you could apply it to your setting (e.g., District of Columbia Public Schools)

Work to ensure salary is fair and there are opportunities for growth
Poll school staff members (e.g., teachers, nurses, school social worker/psychologist, guidance counselors, behavioral specialists, administrators), community providers and students, family members and caregivers about expertise in relevant mental health-related content.

Offer professional development activities that use the diverse knowledge and skills of family-school-community partners engaged in school mental health.

Train school- and community-employed mental health providers on the same topics, at the same time (such as evidence-based services or supports, policies or procedures related to Individualized Education Programs, etc.).

Engage youth and family leaders and advocates in professional development as trainers and learners.

Use diverse professional development mechanisms (in-person and virtual lectures, presentations, consultation, coaching, mentoring and written resources).

**Example from the Field**

District example: A community-partnered school mental health program in an urban district in Maryland has successfully retained staff for an average of over six years by:

- Integrating federal loan forgiveness programs for staff
- Offering ongoing high-quality professional development training opportunities
- Providing opportunities for professional growth and leadership
- Including staff recognition and wellness as part of bi-weekly staff meetings
- Being flexible with schedules and ability to work part-time

**Maximize the expertise and resources of school mental health partners**

**Best Practices**

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Professional Development

- Make a list of potential training that can be available based on expertise of core partners
- Set up and widely disseminate a training calendar of available trainings
- Develop a listserv to keep people informed of available trainings
- Convene a training committee dedicated to finding and providing training opportunities

Tips

- Community mental health providers training teachers on identification of mental health problems
- School psychologists training community mental health providers on school language and policy
- Youth and family members training school-based mental health providers on effective ways to engage and support student mental health
- Training school staff as trainers of an evidence-based mental health practice to train the larger community mental health workforce

For more resources, visit the SHAPE Resource Library at www.theSHAPEsystem.com

SHAPE
School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System