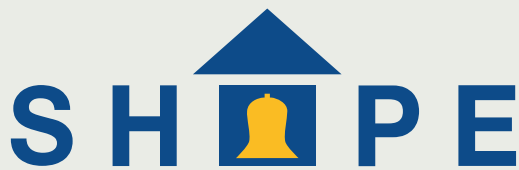


School Mental Health Quality Guide

Funding & Sustainability



School Health Assessment
and Performance Evaluation System



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. The Quality Guides provide information 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 Citation

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The mission of the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) is to strengthen policies and programs in school mental health to improve learning and promote success for America's youth.

Funding & Sustainability

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

In order to maintain long-term programming, school mental health systems depend 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** to ensure that operational structures are sound, and that the system can respond to the changing needs of students, families, schools, and communities.

Federal Funding Streams to Support School Mental Health

Block Grants

Federal block grants are allocated to states based on demographic characteristics such as population and unemployment. 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 Grants

Also referred to as 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) and Project Prevent.

Legislative Earmarks

Legislative earmarks, which provide funding for a limited time period, refer to provisions that allocate a certain amount of money for a specific project or initiative. *An example of a legislative earmark for school mental health includes reserving part of an annual budget for addressing school safety.*

Medicaid

The Medicaid program, a partnership between the state and Federal governments, is a key source of funding school mental health services. **Multiple state Medicaid programs** cover school mental health services for all Medicaid-enrolled students, but many others limit coverage to students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



Action Steps

1. **Brainstorm a list of relevant federal agencies to follow.** For example:
 - U.S. Department of Education
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
 - Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
 - National Institute of Justice (NIJ)
2. **The Grants Learning Center** provides steps to registering, as well as other helpful information including grant eligibility, grant policies, and grant terms.
3. **Register** to receive regular federal funding announcements from 26 federal agencies through [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

* **Note:** Some agency websites allow individuals to receive agency-specific funding announcements. For example, SAMHSA frequently issues announcements for Request for Applications (RFAs) through their [listserv](#).



Resources

- **The new school Medicaid guidance**, released in 2023 by *The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*, aims to offer new flexibilities and consolidate existing guidance, making it easier for all schools to receive payment for delivering Medicaid-covered services.
- The *Medicaid and School Based Services' **Technical Assistance Center*** seeks to assist and expand the capacity of State Medicaid agencies, local education agencies (LEAs), and school-based entities to provide greater assistance under Medicaid.
- The **Healthy Students, Promising Futures** webpage, a *Healthy Schools Campaign* program, has information on the state of school Medicaid across the country and other related resources.
- *The Hopeful Futures Campaign's **School Mental Health Report Cards*** provide state scores based on support for funding of school mental health services for all Medicaid-eligible students.

State Funding Streams to Support School Mental Health

Tax Revenue

A limited number of states specifically target tax dollars for student mental health efforts.

In California, funds from **Proposition 63** are used to fund activities authorized under the **Mental Health Services Act**, which include various services and supports for school-aged youths, such as childhood trauma prevention and early intervention efforts, as well as mental health outreach and engagement strategies.

State Budget

Some states dedicate a line item in their budget for mental health services that can be accessed to help fund SMH services.

For example, in a budget approved in April 2019, New York State directed \$500,000 to the School Mental Health Resource & Training Center.

State Grants

State grants fund mental health service provision, which can include school mental health services.

*The **School-Linked Behavioral Health program** in Minnesota provides approximately \$17.5 million to support school mental health services across 308 school districts and 1158 schools.*



Action Step

1. **Develop a list of state-level agencies to regularly follow for grant opportunities, including for example, the Departments of Education, Behavioral Health, Public Health, Mental Health, and Health.**



Tip

Listings for state-funded grant opportunities vary 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 office and ask where to look.**



Resource

State Funding for Student Mental Health explores and describes common sources of funding that states use to support K-12 school-based mental health programming and provides an overview of how states use those sources of funding to serve students.

Other Funding Streams to Support School Mental Health

Local Funding

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

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 programming.

School-Level Support

Principal discretionary dollars refer to non-earmarked funds that a principal can allocate. Funds from the *Parent Teacher Association* are another form of discretionary dollars that can be allocated to school mental health efforts.

Private Support

Foundation funding tends to be more flexible. Private 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 to expand and enhance the quality of school mental health services in Wards 7 and 8 of Washington, DC—areas with high poverty rates.



Resources

- *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.
- *Candid's* **Foundation Directory** is a leading source on philanthropy worldwide. They maintain an online database with information on over 242,000 grantmakers, including corporate foundations, U.S. federal funders, public charities, and international foundations. They also offer useful tools and data insights to help teams evaluate funders and manage tasks associated with prospecting and applying for grants.
- **The United Way** can help connect other agencies and/or initiatives within communities.

Use multiple and diverse funding and resources to support a full continuum of school mental health services and supports



Best Practices

- Use multiple and diverse funding sources from different levels (e.g., school, local, district, state, federal), types of funding (e.g., grants, third party reimbursement, cost sharing, private foundation funding, block grants), and different systems (e.g., education, physical, mental, and public health, substance use, juvenile justice).
- Ensure funding and resources align to support a full continuum of services and supports.
- Intentionally seek out funding for programming and/or services (including addressing trauma, well-being, cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and equity) that meet the needs of a diverse school community.
- Establish and use a process to develop, regularly evaluate, and update your financing plan.
- Establish and use a process to regularly monitor new funding opportunities and local, state and federal policies that may affect funding for comprehensive school mental health systems.





Tip: Coordinated Funding Streams

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 Funding	Occurs when various agencies pool and coordinate resources to provide needed services, while maintaining the integrity of each agency's funding stream. Administratively, braided funding requires ensuring that funds from each source is used for particular costs; funders often require a detailed explanation of how funds are used.
Blended Funding	Occurs when separate agencies contribute to a common pool or comingle funds into a single source from which agreed service goals are purchased.



Examples from the Field

- 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
- 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





Action Step

1. **Identify funds from the school, local, state, and federal level that are used to support your comprehensive school mental health system.**
 - Bring together diverse agencies and organizations to strategize about opportunities for blending/braiding funding to meet larger system goals connected to school mental health services and supports.



Resources

- **A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide: Developing a Comprehensive Financing Plan** provides teams with direction in their funding and sustainability efforts. This guide addresses seven 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 to improve the workforce and provider network for behavioral health services for children and families
 - Financing for accountability
- **Financing for What?** is a worksheet which includes templates to help teams think through development, sustainability, cost estimates, resource mapping, and funding gaps.

Leverage funding and resources to attract potential contributors



Best Practices

- Establish and use a formal agreement that specifies contingent funding and/or non-financial resources.
- Regularly seek potential diverse partners who may have funding or non-financial resources that can be contributed to support the larger school mental health system.
- Foster relationships with diverse agencies and organizations in the community, that value cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and equity, with a goal to create mutually beneficial opportunities that will support students and families.



Resources

- Teams can share key talking points about their school mental health program when developing and establishing relationships. **This example list of talking points**, developed by *The Indiana School Mental Health Initiative*, can be used as a guide.
- **Leading by Convening** provides suggestions for ensuring the right mix of stakeholders are identified and participating.
- **An example memorandum of understanding (MOU)** can help teams develop clear and thorough MOUs.





Action Steps

- 1. Conduct a comprehensive scan of existing funding opportunities available at the school, local, state, and federal levels.**
- 2. 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.**
- 3. Develop an MOU that clearly documents agreed upon services.**
 - *For example: "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."*
- 4. Think beyond dollars and consider exchanging services, such as professional development and training.**
 - *For example, if one group is particularly skilled at providing training on a given evidence-based program or practice, instead of the school or community partner having to purchase that training, the group can exchange it as a service and way of sharing funding expenses.*





Best Practices

- Provide in-person and virtual ongoing professional development activities such as lectures, didactic presentations, and peer consultation.
- 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).
- Practice open, bidirectional communication and provide opportunities for staff to provide anonymous input if desired.
- Offer flexible work schedules.
- Recognize and address the impact on staff of secondary traumatic stress.
- Collaborate with staff to provide, monitor, and evaluate staff wellness activities.
- Engage diverse staff to provide input on how to optimize staff retention across different groups and identities.
- Provide supervision and opportunities for peer support (e.g., new hire mentor and support group, supervision, buddy program).
- Outline pathways and provide clear opportunities for career advancement.
- Provide incentive-based pay.
- Work to ensure salary is fair and equitable and that there are growth opportunities.
- Ensure all staff are aware of the district's Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health coverage in insurance benefits.
- Ensure that all policies, procedures, and practices related to staff are culturally responsive, anti-racist, and equitable.





Example from the Field

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.



Resources

- Housed on the *School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) System*, the **Organizational Well-Being Inventory for Schools (OWBI-S)** assesses the organizational well-being of school systems.
- **Teacher WISE** is a research-informed program that helps teachers and school staff manage five areas of their well-being: physical, occupational, intellectual, social, and emotional.
- **The Adult Resilience Curriculum (ARC) for Educators** can help educators and their organizations navigate barriers to well-being. Through self-paced learning or institutional efforts, ARC provides the structure that is often missing from meaningful well-being programming.

Maximize the expertise and resources of all school mental health partners* to support ongoing professional development activities

* Partners may include school- and community-employed staff, local community groups, higher education partners, youth, and families.



Best Practices

- Poll school staff members (e.g., teachers, nurses, school social workers/psychologists, guidance counselors, behavioral specialists, administrators), community providers, other providers who offer services in school, students, family members, and caregivers about expertise in relevant mental health-related content, including cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and equity, as well as trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches.
- Offer professional development activities that use the diverse knowledge and skills of family-school-community partners engaged in school mental health. Examples include:
 - Have school mental health providers partner with community mental health providers to train school staff on the signs and symptoms of exposure to trauma, identifying and supporting students in the classroom, and making referrals for mental health and trauma-related concerns.
 - Have school psychologists, social workers, and/or counselors train community mental health providers on inclusive school language and policy.
 - Have professionals with relevant expertise train educators and school-based clinicians on cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and equity practices for promoting positive mental health and well-being.
 - Have school mental health and health care providers train school staff and community providers on how mental health and healthcare systems can communicate and interact effectively with education staff to improve student well-being.
- Train school- and community-employed mental health providers on the same topics at the same time (e.g., evidence-informed services or supports, policies or procedures related to Individualized Education Programs) to foster mutuality and collaboration.
- Engage youth, family leaders, and advocates in professional development as learners and trainers, offering opportunities for school staff to hear youth and family perspectives and experiences.
- Use diverse professional development mechanisms (e.g., in-person and virtual lectures, presentations, consultation, coaching, mentoring, written resources).





Action Steps

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

Ideas for Potential Trainings:

Community mental health providers training teachers on identification of mental health concerns.

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 to train the larger community mental health workforce on an evidence-based mental health practice.



Ensure funding and resources across each tier to support a full continuum of services and supports while maximizing reimbursement opportunities for eligible services



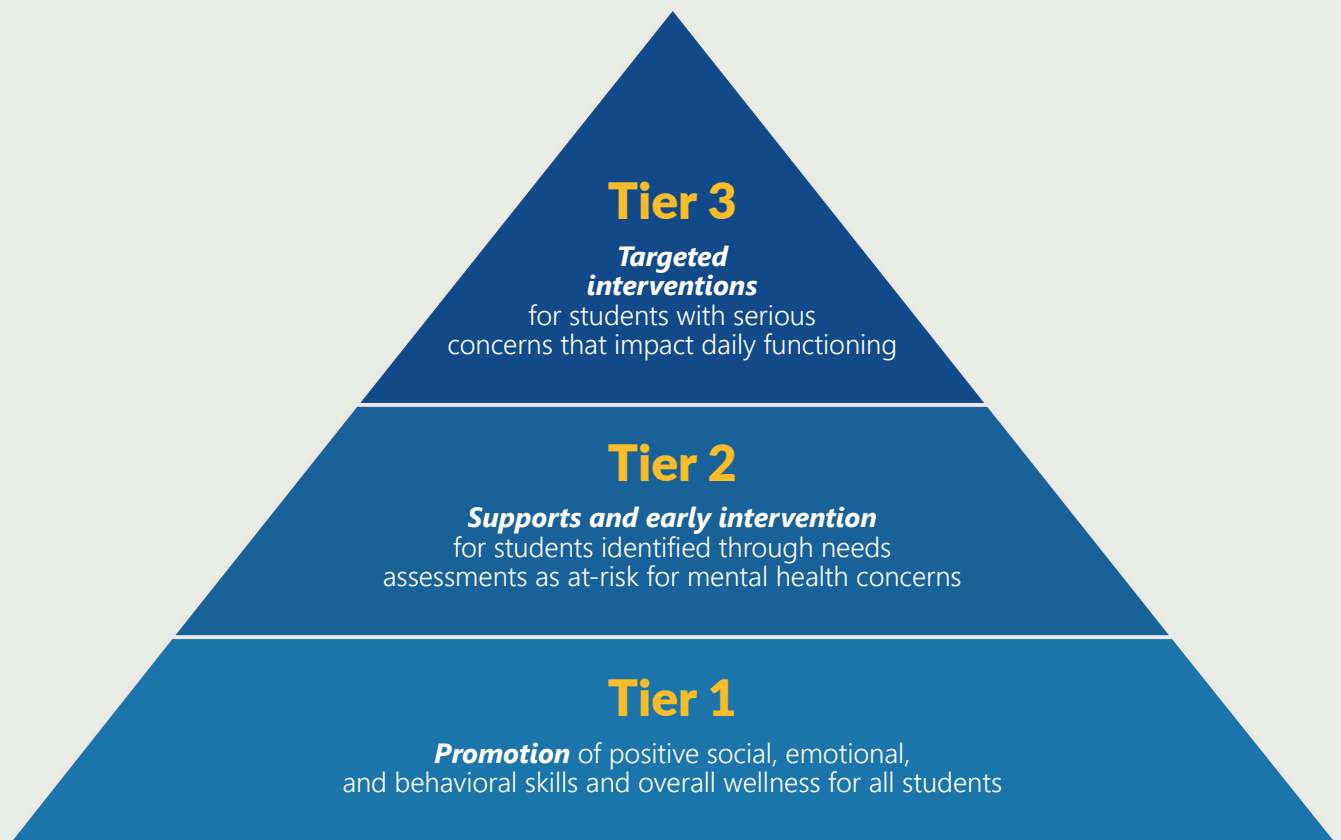
Action Step

1. 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. This exercise will help teams identify gaps in services and supports and provides structure to outline a long-term plan.



Resource

[Sample Resource Mapping Worksheet](#)





Action Step

2. 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 Tiers 1, 2, and 3:

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use seed dollars to support Tier 1 (<i>state, district, and community partners</i>).• Provide schoolwide evidence-based programs (EBPs).• Integrate EBPs into school curriculum.• Provide annual booster EBP trainings for staff.• Provide cross-training among school staff and community partners.• Partner with community organizations to provide EBPs.• Train professionals to train others through a “train-the-trainer” model.• Collaborate with school organizations or business partners for EBP supplies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Student Support Teams to efficiently triage students at risk for mental health concerns to school and community supports.• Utilize mental health staff to provide prevention group activities based on identified needs.• Provide in-school and/or after-school small prevention groups through community partners.• Seek funding for prevention activities through collaborative partnerships with entities such as community programs, hospitals, private foundations, and businesses.• Use county tax revenue to fund prevention programs.• Develop memoranda of agreements (MOAs) and/or contracts with community organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop MOUs between school districts and public and/or private mental/behavioral health providers.• Maximize current reimbursement mechanisms.• Have clear referral mechanisms and communication strategies to collaborate with community providers.• Promote public and private partnerships to increase funding available for school mental health.• Integrate training of advanced graduate students into the program to enhance service provision and workforce development funding available for school mental health.



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



School Mental Health Quality Guide At A Glance: Funding & Sustainability



- 1 Use multiple and diverse funding and resources to support a full continuum of school mental health services and supports**
- 2 Leverage funding and resources to attract potential contributors**
- 3 Have strategies in place to retain staff**
- 4 Maximize the expertise and resources of all school mental health partners to support ongoing professional development activities**
- 5 Ensure funding and resources across each tier to support a full continuum of services and supports while maximizing reimbursement opportunities for eligible services**



Best Practices

- Use **multiple and diverse funding sources**.
- **Ensure funding and resources align** to support a full continuum of services and supports, and meet the needs of a diverse school community.
- Establish and use a process to **develop, regularly evaluate, and update your financing plan**.
- Establish and use a process to **regularly monitor new funding opportunities** and local, state, and federal policies that may affect funding for comprehensive school mental health systems.
- Establish and use a **formal agreement** that **specifies contingent funding and/or non-financial resources**.
- **Seek diverse partners** with funding or non-financial resources that can support the larger school mental health system.
- Foster relationships and **collaborate with diverse community agencies** and organizations.
- Ensure all policies, procedures, and practices related to staff are **culturally responsive, anti-racist, and equitable**.
- Provide in-person and virtual **ongoing professional development activities**.
- Regularly recognize and **celebrate staff accomplishments** and personal milestones.
- Practice **open, bidirectional communication** with staff and provide opportunities for anonymous input.
- Offer **flexible work schedules**.
- Recognize and address the **impact of secondary traumatic stress** on staff.
- Collaborate with staff to provide, monitor, and evaluate **staff wellness activities**.
- Engage diverse staff to provide **input on optimizing staff retention**.
- Provide supervision and **opportunities for peer support**.
- Outline pathways to **career advancement**.
- Provide **incentive-based pay** and ensure **salary is fair and equitable**.
- Ensure all **staff are aware of the district's Employee Assistance Program** and insurance benefits.
- **Offer professional development activities** that utilize the diverse knowledge and skills of family-school-community partners engaged in school mental health.



Tips

- Look for **grant opportunity listservs** and sign up to **receive regular updates**.
- Strategically **identify and combine multiple funding streams**; consider **braided** and **blended** funding strategies.

School Mental Health Quality Guide *At A Glance:* Funding & Sustainability



Action Steps

- **Develop a list of federal and state-level agencies** to regularly follow for grant opportunities.
- **Bring together diverse agencies and organizations** to strategize about opportunities for blending/braiding funding to meet larger system goals.
- Conduct a comprehensive **scan of existing funding opportunities** available at the school, local, state, and federal levels.
- **Establish partnerships** with behavioral health programs, agencies, and organizations to expand available services to students and leverage existing funding resources and infrastructure.
- **Develop an MOU** that clearly documents agreed upon services.
- Think beyond dollars **and consider exchanging services**, such as professional development and training.
- **Convene a training committee** dedicated to finding and providing training opportunities.
- **Develop a training calendar** and establish methods for wide dissemination.
- **Map currently available Tier 1, 2, and 3 services and supports**, determine the sources and amounts of funding, and **identify resource strengths and gaps at each tier**.



Examples from the Field

- **An urban district in Maryland utilizes blended funding** to pool and leverage funding from: fee-for-service reimbursement, city taxes, school district funds, municipal budgets, foundations, and other grants.
- **Pennsylvania has used braided funding to combine funding** from: Medicaid, CHIP, and private insurance for behavioral health treatment services; mental health, drug, and alcohol allocations for Student Assistance Program teams; education system for the training of team members on Positive Behavior Support (PA PBS) or Youth Mental Health First Aid; and drug and alcohol funding for evidence-based prevention services in schools.
- **A community-partnered school mental health program in an urban district in Maryland has retained staff for over six years** by: integrating federal loan forgiveness programs for staff; offering ongoing professional development activities; providing professional growth and leadership opportunities; integrating staff recognition and wellness into staff meetings; and establishing schedule flexibility.



Resources

- [The 2023 School Medicaid Guidance](#)
- [The Medicaid and School Based Services' Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Healthy Students, Promising Futures](#)
- [The Hopeful Futures Campaign's School Mental Health Report Cards](#)
- [State Funding for Student Mental Health](#)
- [The Grantsmanship Center's State Grant Resources](#)
- [Candid's Foundation Directory](#)
- [The United Way](#)
- [Financing for What?](#)
- [A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide: Developing a Comprehensive Financing Plan](#)
- [The Indiana School Mental Health Initiative's example list of talking points](#)
- [Leading by Convening](#)
- [Example memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#)
- [The Organizational Well-Being Inventory for Schools \(OWBI-S\)](#)
- [Teacher WISE](#)
- [The Adult Resilience Curriculum \(ARC\) for Educators](#)
- [Sample Resource Mapping Worksheet](#)