

Youth Health Pros Want \$25M For 100 New School-Based Care Centers

Various youth health professionals in Michigan are seeking a \$25 million appropriation to establish 100 new school-based health centers that can help students with their medical, behavioral and dental health needs. The goal is to put at least one health center in each Michigan county.

Leading the request to the Legislature for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 was the School Community Health Alliance of Michigan (SCHAM), an organization representing school-based and -linked health centers. The group speaks for more than 100 sites serving 200,000-plus children.

"(It's) no surprise that the rates of depression, isolation and anxiety have all increased as reported by youth," said Deb **BRINSON**, SCHAM's interim executive director. "While the rates are dropping for suicide in Michigan, youth rates are the worst in the nation."

Brinson spoke at a press conference hosted this afternoon by Resch Strategies in Lansing. She also represents Honor Community Health, which operates six school-based health centers in Oakland County.

After the Oxford High School shooting in November 2021 – which resulted in four student deaths – Brinson said numerous Honor Community Health staff members "joined immediately in providing crisis intervention and counseling to students, families and teachers."

"We have learned that no school is immune from such atrocities and that mental health concerns plague our youth," Brinson said. "Today, we're asking for \$25 million in the upcoming fiscal year to help establish 100 more centers throughout the state. Currently, there are 150 on the list that desire one of these programs. Our kids are waiting for help."

She said one in five children – aged three to 17 years-old – had an emotional, mental health or behavioral disorder at some point in their life. Secondly, she said from 2009 to 2019, the number of high school students who reported persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness skyrocketed by 40%.

Jeff **COOK**, the director of child and adolescent health at Beaumont Health, said the aforementioned centers are located within or near a school, and are "highly focused on quality."

"The whole purpose of this is to break down barriers. Many of our students have no means of transportation to get to their doctor's appointments. A lot of families struggle with taking time off," Cook said. "Having these additional centers inside these schools will provide an opportunity for these students to receive needed health care services."

He said the philosophy of the programs is to provide services "inside the school, where students spend the bulk of their time." He also said data shows that students with access to a school-linked health center perform "much better in the classroom," especially with care providers immediately accessible to them without the push to miss learning time.

"So often, if students need to receive physical or mental services, and the services aren't available in the schools, then they'll miss an entire morning or potentially an entire day of school for that one appointment that may take 45 minutes to an hour," said Kim **BARON**, the director of health services at Grand Rapids Public Schools.

Baron said Grand Rapids Public Schools is on track to have 12 therapists. She said that while the district has amazing teachers, it needed more care professionals trained to handle diagnoses and treatments.

"I think one of the unique things about school-based health centers is we're all connected to different health systems," Brinson said. "We're connected to hospitals, we're connected to local health departments that are connected to (federally qualified health centers). . . and we're able to pull on that group of social workers to bring them in."

She said the annual operational cost of one of these centers is \$225,000, as they are open year-round and beyond school hours and require a medical assistant, a full-time therapist and either a physician, nurse practitioner or a physician assistant.