

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

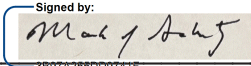
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Arlington County
Program Title: School Based Behavioral Health Program
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Lynne Porfiri
Title: Chief of Staff
Department: Office of the County Manager
Telephone: 703-228-0599 Website: www.arlingtonva.us
Email: lporfiri@arlingtonva.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Mark J. Schwartz
Title: County Manager
Signature: 



Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Award Submission

Context for the Problem and Challenge Area

Mental health affects every aspect of our lives: how we feel about ourselves and the world; solve problems, cope with stress, and overcome challenges; build relationships and connect with others; and perform in school, at work, and throughout life. The US is having a mental health crisis for youth that must be addressed at every level. According to the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2021 Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health, youth mental health challenges and suicide rates have been increasing for at least a decade. Multiple factors have contributed to this trend, including increased academic pressure, increased use of digital media, alcohol and drug use, and structural injustices such as rising income inequality, racism, gun violence, and climate change.

Mental Health America reported that Virginia is ranked 48th in the United States for access to youth mental health care. Virginia’s governor and lawmakers have acknowledged the urgent need for a coordinated response across the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Youth Survey (VYS), commonly referred to as the Youth Risk and Behavior Survey (YRBS) in other states, has been developed to monitor priority health risk behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The survey is administered every odd year in randomly selected Virginia public schools.

From November 13, 2023, to December 8, 2023, the selected grade 6-12 classrooms in Arlington Public Schools (APS) completed the Virginia Youth Survey (VYS) during the school day. These

randomly selected classes were asked to participate at the following schools: Dorothy Hamm Middle School, Gunston Middle School, Kenmore Middle School, Swanson Middle School, Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Wakefield High School, Washington-Liberty High School, Williamsburg Middle School, and Yorktown High School.

Key results from the study reveal that as Arlington students age from middle school into high school, there is a notable increase in the percentage of students who report their mental health as “not good most of the time or always”. Although the sample size was small, most APS middle and high school students reported feeling sad, hopeless, stressed, or overwhelmed enough (at least once in a while or more) to stop participating in their activities. Additionally, 77% of Black and 78% of Hispanic students feel stressed/overwhelmed. 76% of Asian students felt sad/hopeless at the time of this survey. Middle and high school APS students are receiving strategies in school to cope, but 71% are not talking to an adult about personal stress, anxiety, or feelings of sadness. Students who identify as LGBTQ are early two and a half times less likely to feel they could get the help they needed most or all of the time.

Solution

Attending schools is the one commonality amongst children and youth which makes it an ideal place for meeting the various mental health needs of children from all backgrounds and identities. Therefore, the Department of Human Services partnered with Arlington Public Schools to create a school-based behavioral health program to meet the needs of the most vulnerable youth who may otherwise lack access to treatment. School Based Behavioral Health Programs are an opportunity to address the youth mental health crisis, advance mental health equity, overcome the many

known barriers young people face to receiving services, and be intentional about addressing the unique needs of young people within the community.

Innovation

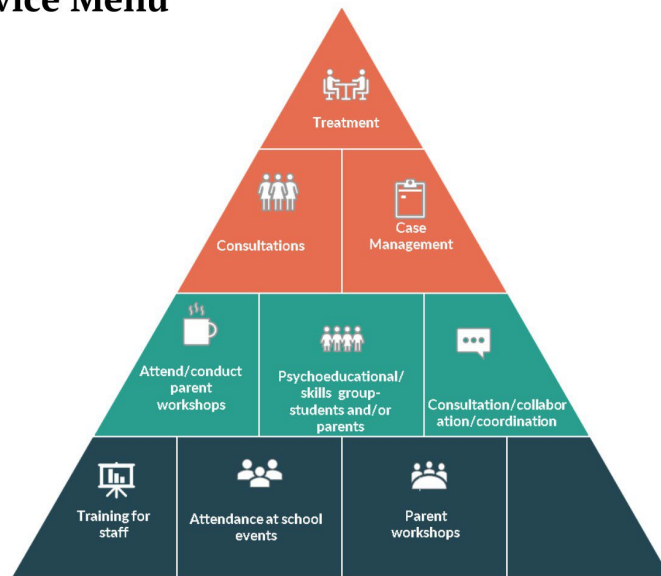
The school based behavioral health program was developed to fill a gap and expand access to mental health and substance use services for children and youth. Arlington's School Based Behavioral Health Program launched November 13, 2023, beginning in Wakefield and Washington-Liberty High Schools. While the initial focus population began with centering youth in high schools it has since expanded into middle and elementary schools. The school-based program now provides therapeutic services to youth in seven schools to include: Arlington Career Center, Carlin Springs Elementary, Kenmore and Swanson Middle Schools, and Yorktown, Washington Liberty, and Wakefield High Schools. Services from DHS are not limited to the academic school year. Services are available year-round and can be provided to students in the school building as long as it is open (even during breaks). When the school building is not open, services are offered at home, alternative community locations like community centers and libraries, at the DHS office, and via telehealth.

School-based clinicians are solution oriented, focused on eliminating barriers and increasing access to behavioral health services, while providing culturally responsive, trauma informed, and evidence based and evidence informed treatment. DHS' school-based staff are located solely in the schools, and they are not assigned clients from our outpatient office. This is a unique aspect of our program, as it allows clinicians to become a part of the school community, maximize youth contact, stakeholder relationships, collaboration and communication.

The school-based behavioral health service model aligns with APS Multi-Tiered System of Support Model (MTSS) [see below]. Tier 3 focuses on clinical treatment and more intensive individual

support needs. These youth have mental health diagnoses that impact their functioning in the school environment and likely outside of school as well. DHS clinicians collaborate with school personnel to ensure that school-based plans are developed to address symptom management. Tier 2 centers youth who may have emerging needs and have been identified as having behavioral health challenges and/or are at risk for developing behavioral health challenges. These youth participate in targeted psychoeducation groups and workshops. Lastly, Tier 1 focuses on universal behavioral health supports such as workshops focused on positive socio- emotional skill building, general wellness coping skill development, and presentations to anyone in the school community on behavioral health topics that support student wellbeing.

Service Menu



School Based Behavioral Health Program Implementation Information

Eligibility Criteria:

- Arlington resident or in the legal custody of the County
- Mental health diagnosis
- Medicaid health insurance or uninsured

- Impairment in functioning

How to Make Referrals

- All referrals will come from and/or will be reviewed with the school mental health/student support team.
- Caregivers can make referrals.
- Students can self-refer.
- Caregivers who contact our main intake line 703-228-1560 and have youth in identified schools, will be offered school-based services and offered an opportunity to come to the office to initiated services and/or referred to the clinician in that school for follow-up.

Who Should Be Referred

- Students aged 4 and older who may have- emotional dysregulation, behavioral problems, mental illness, school related issues (not educational), adjustment difficulties, home disruptions, community/legal involvement, recently reunified families.
- Students with extensive emotional and behavioral dysregulation (regardless of presence of mental health diagnosis).
- Students with multi system involvement and in need of emotional and/or resource support.
- Students who demonstrate challenges in the home and whose families need support or linkage to resources.
- Students and caregivers who have needs beyond the school day –i.e. who could benefit from home-based sessions, after-school appointments with caregivers, community sessions, additional services from DHS.

Please see flyer below for more information and marketing material about the school-based program.

A Department of Human Services and Arlington Public Schools collaborative effort to support Arlington's youth and families.

DHS School-Based Behavioral Health Program



The School-Based Program offers the same services provided at the Department of Human Services (DHS) building, only the clinicians are co-located inside of select Arlington Public Schools.



Mission

- Increased behavioral and emotional regulation
- Remove barriers, including transportation, access, and scheduling
- Support academic achievement by reducing psychological barriers to learning



Some Reasons to Refer:

- Student is under 18 currently experiencing, or has experienced:
- Trauma
 - Mental health/behavioral/emotional challenges
 - School related issue (not educational)
 - Adjustment difficulties
 - Home disruptions
 - Community/legal involvement
 - Recently reunified families



Services Offered:

- Individual/group/family therapy
- School staff support and consultation
- Mental health evaluation
- Mental health case management
- Crisis intervention
- Connecting families to community resources
- Referrals to community mental health programs and specialty care
- Psychiatric/medication services (at DHS office only)



Current APS Schools with DHS School-Based Clinicians:

- Carlin Springs Elementary School
- Kenmore Middle School
- Swanson Middle School
- Washington Liberty High School
- Wakefield High School
- Yorktown High School
- Arlington Career Center



Services are available to Arlington County youth and their families, who meet criteria, prioritization, and complete an intake and financial assessment.

For more information about the School-Based Program or if a student's school is not listed above, please contact us at (703) 228-1560.

A Model of Collaboration and Partnership

Creating a new program for Arlington's children demanded communication and collaboration at every level from top level leadership to front line service delivery teams. The school-based behavioral health program was fully supported by the Arlington County Board and County Manager's office. The Arlington County Board provided funding for 4 new positions to begin the program.

For several months, top level administrators at DHS and APS met consistently to move the program from idea to action. Arlington Department of Human Services leaders co-created a Memorandum of Understanding with Arlington Public Schools leadership to clearly identify the program scope, delineate roles, responsibilities and resource allocation to include office space, phone usage and technical support. The hiring process began in June 2023 and moved quickly to staff up the program. The first hires began in October 2023 and DHS began the onboarding and training. DHS and APS staff worked collaboratively to ensure that staff were introduced to principals and personnel in each school. Walk throughs were conducted at each school to ensure adequate office and clinical space for client privacy. As a standard part of program implementation, APS and DHS staff attend joint meetings to work on the referral processes and staff cases of students who may require services. The DHS management team also meets monthly with the APS liaison where successes are highlighted and any areas in need of attention are identified. This team has consistently demonstrated exceptional customer service, collaboration, and commitment to providing quality behavioral health services to youth in schools. DHS dedicated one manager to implement, coordinate, and evaluate the SBBHP, guide daily operations, serve as a liaison, and

provide clinical supervision to 5.5 total clinicians. The clinicians currently provide services in seven schools (4 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 elementary school).

The school-based clinicians perform the following duties:

- Conduct intake assessments to determine eligibility for services and clinical recommendations.
- Provide outpatient mental health and substance use services to youth located in schools.
- Facilitate psychoeducation groups within the school & community setting to students and families.
- Provide case management services to include linkage to resources and monitoring effectiveness of services.
- Collaborate with APS staff in weekly and/or monthly staff meetings to include APS clinical staff i.e. school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and other staff members.
- Consult potential referrals, resources, general information, etc. with staff and clients.
- Perform outreach activities to inform the community about services.
- Attend various school events like back-to-school nights, teen health fairs, bullying prevention, Signs of Suicide (SOS), etc.

Program Results

Key Statistics from November 2023 to date:

- 303 referrals*
- Completed 142 intake assessments
- 112 admitted clients

**note, not all students referred and/or assessed for services, want and/or are eligible.*

In January 2025, school staff with a school-based clinician were surveyed. Of the 46 survey respondents, survey results yield positive feedback about the program thus far.

The program scored an average rating of 4.52 out of 5 on the Likert scale.

Some highlighted comments about the SBBHP are as follows:

“Very helpful to many of our students in need of behavioral health support but families have barriers to getting them to DHS.”

“I love having access to a provider who can assist with answering questions about connecting students to appropriate services in the community. It is helpful when students can receive services while at school as it reduces stress and appointments that parents have to miss work for.

“Our DHS provider has been an additional resource for other services that may be available. I love being connected to a provider who cares about the needs of the students. Having our provider has been a very welcome addition to the team.”

“Accessibility to services for our families; removal of barriers to counseling/therapy for our most vulnerable population; collaboration and strong partnership between school and DHS”

Executive Summary

The School-Based Behavioral Health Program (SBBHP) was created and implemented in 2023 in response to significant decline in mental wellbeing for students in APS. The program utilizes an innovative design and approach to behavioral health. The SBBHP is operated as a part of the outpatient services program in the Children's Behavioral Health Bureau, which is embedded in the Child and Family Services Division at the Department of Human Services. It was designed to reinforce and strengthen family and communities' efforts to enhance youth mental wellness by teaching and coaching youth to develop coping skills for managing emotional challenges to improve functioning at home, school, and in the community. Cooperation and collaboration among school, community, and home are essential for a successful behavioral health program.

Furthermore, it enables students to be knowledgeable about healthy lifestyles and encourages them to utilize the behavioral health care system to promote health and well-being.

The SBBHP is a collaborative effort with Arlington County Public Schools to support youth and families. It helps to increase behavioral and emotional regulation, remove barriers (including transportation, access, and scheduling), support academic achievement by reducing psychological barriers to learning, and assist in destigmatizing mental health supports. There are 5.5 FTE clinicians who provide comprehensive, trauma informed, and culturally responsive mental health and substance use services in seven schools (4 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 elementary school). Services include intake assessments, individual/group/family therapy, school staff support and consultation, mental health case management, crisis intervention, connecting families to community resources, and referrals to community mental health programs and specialty care. Since November 2023, SBBHP has received 303 referrals, completed 142 intake assessments, and 112 admitted clients. This team has consistently demonstrated exceptional customer service, collaboration, and commitment to providing quality behavioral health services to youth in schools.