



Student Wellness & Success Funding Report: Over 3,000 Whole Child Initiatives Implemented Supporting Over 1 Million Ohio Children

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The research is clear, when children have their basic needs met and are healthy, they are more ready to learn and be successful.¹ In response to the growing needs of children and families, in 2019, with [House Bill 166](#), the DeWine Administration and 133rd General Assembly made a landmark investment of \$675 million in the state budget to support the whole child. Aligned with the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) [Each Child, Our Future strategic plan](#), these dollars were appropriated to assist schools in providing their students with mental health counseling, wraparound services, mentoring opportunities, and other initiatives to support whole child physical, social, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing.^{2 3}

On December 22nd, the Ohio Department of Education released its [2019-2020 Student Wellness and Success Funds Report](#) detailing how funds allocated towards whole child wellness and success were used by schools,

Figure 1 Source: 2019-2020 Student Wellness and Success Fund Survey Data Report

districts, and their community partners over the last two years.⁴

District Use of Funds				
Allowable Use	Number of schools or districts	% of total districts/schools*	Number of initiatives	% of total initiatives
Mental health services	646	66.0%	874	28.5%
Physical health care services	337	34.4%	404	13.2%
Mentoring programs	285	29.1%	347	11.3%
Community liaisons	268	27.4%	329	10.7%
Family engagement and support services	266	27.2%	334	10.9%
Student services provided prior to or after the regularly scheduled school day or any time school is not in session	167	17.1%	190	6.2%
Professional development regarding the provision of trauma-informed care	157	16.0%	190	6.2%
Services for child welfare-involved youth	142	14.5%	185	6.0%
Services for homeless youth	90	9.2%	117	3.8%
Professional development regarding cultural competence	87	8.9%	98	3.2%
City Connects programming	1	0.1%	1	0%
Total Number of Initiatives			3,069	

* "Total districts/schools" is computed based on the 979 districts and schools eligible for funding.

Over the biennium, student wellness and success funds were allocated to traditional school districts, community schools, joint vocational school districts as well as STEM schools. These funds required a specific set of parameters for their use, but generally, districts were given flexibility in how they funded existing or new initiatives in order to meet the unique needs of their students and local communities.

The survey data reported by districts on the use of these funds shows that:

- More than 3,000 support initiatives were planned or implemented in districts using these funds over the last two years, serving more than one million students.
- Many The majority of funds were used for mental health which accounted for nearly 30% of all initiatives. Of the \$275 million allocated for

¹ Basch CE. Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. *J Sch Health*. 2011;81(10):593–598. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00632.x.

² Ohio Department of Education. Every Child, Our Future: Ohio’s Education Strategic Plan. Accessed from: <http://education.ohio.gov/About/EachChildOurFuture>

³ Ohio Legislative Service Commission. H.B. 166 Operating Budget. Accessed from:

<https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-documents?id=GA133-HB-166>

⁴ Ohio Department of Education. (Dec 22, 2021). 2019-2020 Student Wellness and Success Funds Report. Accessed from: [Student Wellness and Success Fund: Survey Data Report \(ohio.gov\)](#)

- FY 2020, \$75 million was spent on mental health services alone by 646 school districts – funding 874 initiatives and impacting 737,191 students.
- 1,105 new initiatives were established using these funds within all allowable use categories. Further, the funds bolstered 941 existing initiatives and supported the expansion of 1,005 initiatives.
- Education Service Centers (ESCs) made up one third of all community partnerships reported.

Even before COVID-19, the [2018-2019 Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey \(OHYES\)](#), which is administered to students in grades 7-12 whose districts opt in to this free and voluntary questionnaire, demonstrated the urgent need for investments targeting whole child wellness and supports. For instance, according to survey data, 30% of students surveyed had anxiety issues warranting further exploration by a mental health professional and 1 in 4 students were experiencing depression warranting further exploration by a mental health professional. Further, 27% of students replied that in the past year they had felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row, and that 16% had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months. It is critical we heed these pre-COVID benchmarks and commit to collecting this data more broadly as we move forward into the next biennium.

The release of this report comes at a time when we know that children’s mental health are at heightened risk considerably amid the pandemic. Millions of Ohio children are experiencing today’s crises in a variety of ways, including increased hunger and food insecurity, the threat of homelessness, disruptions in routine doctor’s visits, loss of family income, and disconnection from friends, schools, and other caring adults. According to [a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) featuring data from the U.S. Census Bureau from Sept. 16th-Oct. 12th, 15% of Ohio households with children reported that they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat, and 16% had slight or no confidence in paying their rent or mortgage on time. In addition, 19% of heads of households with children reported that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless.⁵

Many school districts used their allocations of Student Health and Wellness funding to mitigate student trauma and foster whole child well-being during the time of COVID-19 and severe economic hardship, such as the [“Meal Mobile” in Massillon City Schools](#) and other initiatives in districts highlighted in the report. However, there is still more to be done, especially in light of steep challenges and conditions, and this will require building on investments made in the last biennium.

*Figure 2 Source: School Model Status Update (December 7, 2020)
Governor DeWine Update on Twitter @GovMikeDeWine*

Model Type	Number of Districts	Percentage of Districts	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Full In-Person	245	40.2%	451,155	29.1%
Partial In-Person	177	29.1%	388,391	25.1%
Full Remote	185	30.4%	691,861	44.7%
Closed	2	0.3%	16,502	1.1%
Total	609	100.00%	1,547,909	100.00%

However, the challenges of the current pandemic mean that some plans have not been fully implemented or are taking on a different approach given the modality of student learning in a particular school district. For instance, 44.7% of students in the state were in a full remote learning setting. It can be

assumed that in districts that are providing instruction remotely and where they are providing behavioral health and mental health counseling and support, the school district would have to assess whether their system, the provider, and the students were equipped with broadband, devices, and subscriptions to services to access telehealth services.

Fortunately, the precedent set by state leaders investing in Student Wellness and Success in the last budget biennium, as well as the initial data released in ODE’s report provides a potential way forward in meeting the needs of the whole child in today’s climate.

⁵ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (Dec. 14, 2020). Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond. Accessed from: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/kids-families-and-covid-19/>

In 2021, we must:

- **Prioritize overall child wellness.** Ohio children are continuing to struggle with challenges brought on by the pandemic that have only compounded pre-existing difficulties in mental and behavioral health. The most recent [U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey](#) data from December shows little change from September and October in the economic wellbeing and stability of Ohio households with children. The data demonstrates a clear need to prioritize whole child wellness in our policy and funding decisions.
- **Elevate data collection and highlight success stories.** In a trying year where schools and districts have met significant challenges, there is a need to collect student health and wellness data on an ongoing basis. The OHYES survey provides critical youth insights that can be collected and used by the school district and their local mental and behavioral health providers to plan services. Further, a concerted effort must be made to highlight and gauge the effectiveness of the innovative programs, policies and best practices that have been implemented by school districts to meet the needs of the whole child. Demonstration of effectiveness and stories from the field are critical for informed policy making and enabling best practices to be adopted by other districts.
- **Preserve investments in Student Wellness and Success Funding in the 2022-2023 state budget.** These funds were critical at the beginning of the 133rd General Assembly, and arguably, the need for them and the community partnerships that support child safety even when schools are virtual is even greater today. Ideally, Ohio's leaders will pass and invest in a more equitable school funding model that makes these funds a permanent component. This is important as many school district officials have expressed hesitation to establish new initiatives without the guarantee that these funds will be available to their districts in the next budget cycle.

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