

NEWS RELEASE

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ILENE SHAPIRO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



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County funding behavioral health and wellness coordinators in four school districts

SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO—County Executive Ilene Shapiro and County Council passed legislation on Monday evening to grant \$750,000 to fund the expansion of the Summit Educational Service Center’s (ESC) Behavioral Health and Wellness Coordinators to four school districts, Manchester Local, Mogadore Local, Stow-Munroe Falls City and Springfield Local. Funding for the program expansion comes from the County’s opioid litigation settlement funds and was recommended by the Opiate Abatement Advisory Council (OAAC). The project will prioritize early identification and intervention for students at risk of behavioral health issues, with a particular focus on substance use disorders.

“Since the pandemic, our children have experienced increasing behavioral health concerns, including depression, anxiety, substance use and other. Summit County has a myriad of available services and supports, but many families struggle to navigate access to these critical resources. Providing coordinators in our schools will help these families quickly and effectively find the assistance their child needs to improve their wellness,” said County Executive Shapiro.

The initiative builds on the success of pilot programs implemented in Coventry and Tallmadge schools, made possible through the generous support of Peg’s Foundation, a leader in mental health advocacy. These foundational efforts demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted mental health interventions and informed the strategies being expanded to the four additional districts.

In collaboration with Akron Children’s Hospital and Child Guidance and Family Solutions, Summit ESC will lead the recruitment, training, and supervision of three Behavioral Health and Wellness Coordinators. These coordinators will implement the Ohio School Wellness Initiative’s Student Assistance Program model, which includes universal screening, a structured referral process, and the formation of Student Assistance Teams. By improving coordination between schools and community-based services, this initiative will address the growing behavioral health challenges faced by Summit County’s youth, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and social isolation. This funding will support the programming through the end of the 2025-2026 school year

“This initiative represents a significant step forward in addressing the mental health needs of students in our county,” said Joe Iacano, Superintendent of Summit ESC. “By integrating health

coordinators into our schools, we are fostering an environment where every student can thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.”

Recognizing the challenges facing children in Summit County, the OAAC solicited Requests for Proposals from local organizations to institute health and wellness coordinators in local schools. The proposal from Summit ESC, that features a focus on making and tracking referrals, aligned strongly with the County’s Opiate Abatement Strategy, Pillar #2 – System Coordination and Infrastructure. To ensure sustainability of the programming, each school district has committed to maintaining the roles after funding from the County is exhausted.

“The OAAC continues to work collaboratively to identify gaps and barriers across the spectrum of substance use and its associated effects, and then seek out local organizations that can provide the appropriate, evidence-based programming”, said Donna Skoda, Summit County Public Health Commissioner and OAAC Stakeholder. “We are confident this program will make a long-term difference in the lives of children and their families.’

Since 2020, County Executive Shapiro and County Council have approved nearly \$17 million in grants for organizations throughout the County that provide programming and resources to abate the opioid epidemic.

Learn more about the OAAC at <https://summitoaac.org/>.

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