



October 14, 2022

Family Based Services Association of NJ (FBSANJ) provides peer support, education and parent mentors to Monmouth County families with children experiencing behavior impairment, mental illness, developmental delays and substance use challenges. All staff have lived experience rearing such children and young adults.

The Board of Directors for FBSANJ would like to thank the Department of Children and Families for their efforts to provide universal behavioral and mental health support to New Jersey's students. We would like to take this opportunity to express our concern for the elimination of all School Based Youth and Social Programs (SBYSP) with the replacement program NJ4S effective July 1, 2023.

NJ4S includes a HUB and Spoke model that will create 15 "hubs" located across the state to provide resources, education, referrals and support to schools and communities. The Hubs are not expected to provide the immediate access to mental health and prevention services that our existing School Based Programs have had for over 35 years. The vision of re-engineering SBYSP was not made with the input of key stakeholders, school officials, legislators, or members of the communities currently served.

The SBYSP model continues to meet the growing demand of mental health crises by providing licensed professionals in each site and providing suicide assessments, crisis intervention, and counseling not otherwise available through the community. This is especially crucial as we are just now beginning to understand the effects the pandemic has had on the mental health of our youth.

The current mental health system of New Jersey including community agencies, private practitioners, and Children's System of Care will not sustain the nearly 30,000 thousand students that access SBYSP services each year, and the proposed NJ4S model will not solve this problem because it is not designed to provide mental healthcare to youth and families.

The elimination of SBYSP will leave the NJ mental health system in a deeper crisis with longer wait lists and disproportionate access to care, leaving many marginalized populations of youth without access to free, immediate, and accessible services. The School Based model is something New Jersey should be proud of, as every state in the nation now struggles to address the growing supply-demand issues of providing adequate mental health care to its residents, and SBYSP does exactly that.

To be clear, while NJ4S is being phrased as “an expansion of School Based services” it is in fact, a complete elimination of SBYSP that will have devastating effects on our community. SBYSP is a program that has proven success for youth and communities throughout New Jersey for over 35 years. No financial, transportation, or insurance barriers exist when providing the essential mental health and prevention services to youth/families on a daily basis, with immediate access to our staff.

A healthy community benefits every person in it. SBYSP is an important means to achieve that. By providing community mental healthcare, our youth can avoid becoming lost in the fragmented and complex mental health system. Programs such as SBYSP also serve to lower medical costs by reducing expensive emergency room visits and hospital stays.

Ask any superintendent, guidance counselor, teacher, or student that has experienced a connection to SBYSP and they will tell you that the program builds connections in meaningful and irreplaceable ways.

The kids and families in our communities deserve better and we urge you to not support the removal of the SBYS program. Keep SBYSP intact, in our schools, and in our communities where it belongs.

Respectfully,

The Family Based Services Association of New Jersey Board of Trustees

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