

the Oneida Daily Dispatch

Madison County Partners with Cazenovia Schools on Satellite Mental Health Clinic



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July 18, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.

WAMPSVILLE, N.Y. — Madison County's Board of Supervisors voted on Tuesday to partner with Cazenovia Central School District to establish a satellite mental health clinic. The clinic is part of a county-sponsored plan to meet the mental health needs of students countywide as they recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other stressors.

Madison County Chairman John Becker organized a Mental Health Task Force to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community in May 2021. The study expanded to address behavioral health crisis services, mobile integrated healthcare, the county's Wellness Resource Network, low-income housing issues, and employee wellness resources.

The Task Force surveyed the Madison County School Districts regarding enhancing school-based mental health and wellness services and supports. The task force also had several focused meetings with districts to discuss their survey responses and to understand their needs related to behavioral health.

"From multiple surveys, the MC Mental Health Task Force found that one of the common themes was stress and need for wellbeing supports for our students, parents, teachers and school staff," Madison County Public Information Officer Samantha Field said.

On May 10, the Madison County Board of Supervisors voted to fund five new social worker positions as part of a pilot School Mental Health Clinic program in four of the county's school districts. All county districts were offered the opportunity to parents with the county to establish school satellite clinics. The Hamilton, Cazenovia, Oneida and Chittenango school districts said they wished to establish clinics.

Oneida City Supervisor Mary Cavanagh (Wards 1-3) explained the plan to Oneida's Common Council in May. She said the county had approved five mental health counselors in schools in the county.

Chittenango had asked for two full-time social workers, and the other districts – Hamilton, Cazenovia, and Oneida – had each requested one full-time social worker.

"Because of the survey results we are going to be creating five positions," Cavanagh said. "They are similar to the school resource officer and one of these will be in Oneida. It's phase one of the program, which will include Cazenovia, Oneida, Hamilton, and Chittenango. This will be a satellite mental health office right in the schools. They will be traveling between school buildings."

The program is being funded by monies from the America Rescue Plan Act. ARPA is a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package approved by the U.S. Congress on March 11, 2021, to help in the recovery from the CPVID-19 pandemic. Madison County Mental Health will generate revenue through insurance billing and patient fees for these services. The agreement has been reviewed and approved by the county's Health and Human Services Committee.

Phase Two will expand the counselors to other schools in the county. The hope, Field said, is to have additional schools sign on to have satellite clinics in the future.

"Madison County is currently recruiting and hiring for these positions, and we are happy to announce that the social worker for Cazenovia, as well as one social worker for Chittenango, have been hired and are currently being trained," Field said. "The social workers will be in the districts by mid-August in order to be ready to serve children at the start of the school year."

The county has also offered to provide schools with Youth Mental Health First Aid training for staff and students. This training is free to districts. Several districts have taken advantage of the opportunity and have scheduled training in the coming weeks and months.

Madison County is one of two counties in the state participating in the program.

Madison County has a 24-hour mental health hotline: (315) 366-2327, ext. 1. The National Suicide Prevention Hotline is 1 (800) 273-8255 (TALK). Those seeking emergency counseling may now also dial 988.