



Joint Study Committee on Chronic Absenteeism

September 22, 2025

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How can schools meet students' needs?

When schools support students' **physical, mental, and emotional health**, they help remove barriers to learning and reduce chronic absenteeism.

School-based Health Centers

- 129 operational SBHCs in GA
- Chronic condition treatment: asthma, diabetes, ADHD, mental health
- Sick care: colds, flu, ear infections
- Well-child visits: flu shots, health and behavioral health screeners
- Social service screeners and referrals

School-based Behavioral Health Programs

- 808 schools implemented Georgia Apex*
- Mental health awareness, literacy, promotion
- Social service screeners and referrals
- Small group skill building
- Behavioral health care: small group counseling, individual treatment

School Social Workers

- Screening / referrals for food, housing, transportation, afterschool programs
- Student and parental skill building
- Behavioral health care

*This number does not reflect a comprehensive count of SBBH programming, as data is not available for non-Apex programming.

Select School-Based Health Recommendations

- 1** Increase funding for school social workers.
- 2** Continue to expand and fund the Georgia Apex Program, including telebehavioral health initiatives.
- 3** Continue to innovate and modernize Georgia's licensure processes and pathways for health clinicians.
- 4** Expand funding for Tier 1 services, including evidence-based or -informed School-based health/School-based behavioral health trainings, and formal and informal peer supports.

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Shaping Brighter Futures: Georgia Apex Program

Dr. Christy Doyle, LPD, LCSW

Senior Director, Office of Children, Young Adults, and Families

September 22, 2025



School-based Mental Health (SBMH) and Why GA Apex Matters



Support where students already are

Care provided in a safe and familiar environment



Identify needs early, connect to a support

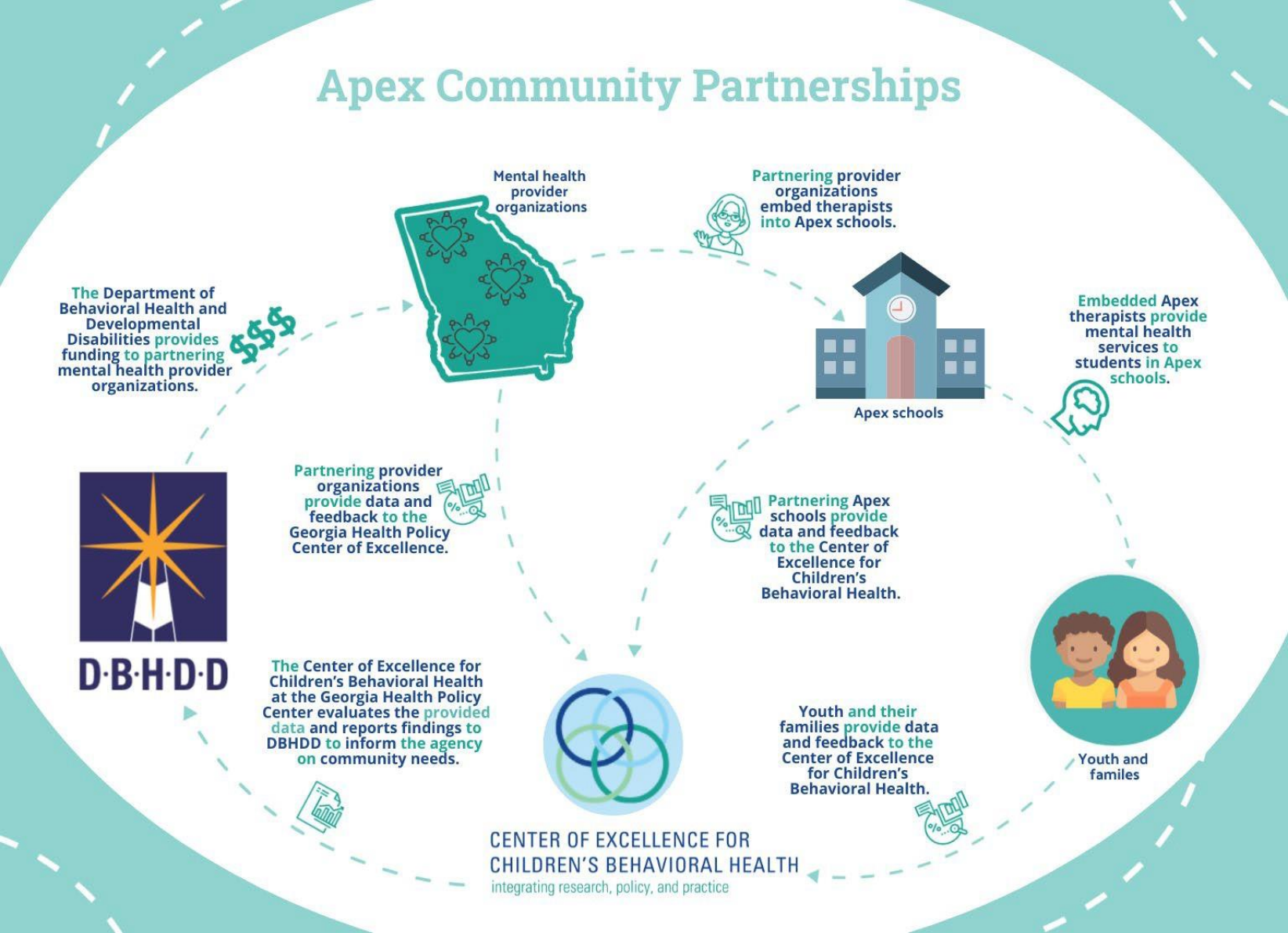
Schools help recognize challenges and link students to the right services



Open doors to care

Decreases stigma and makes access to mental health support easier

Apex Program: Connecting the Dots:



Apex: Programmatic Goals

Detection: Provide early detection of child and adolescent behavioral health needs

Access: Increase access to mental health services for children and youth

Coordination: Sustain increased coordination between Georgia's community mental health providers and local schools/school districts in their service areas



Apex Program: Closing the Continuum Gap

Improved access to care (2024-2025)

- **7,243** students received mental health services from an Apex therapist for the first time
- **12,453** Referrals made for Apex Services
- **71%** of parents reported that their child was better able to handle daily life after Apex services.

Apex Tiered Support Model

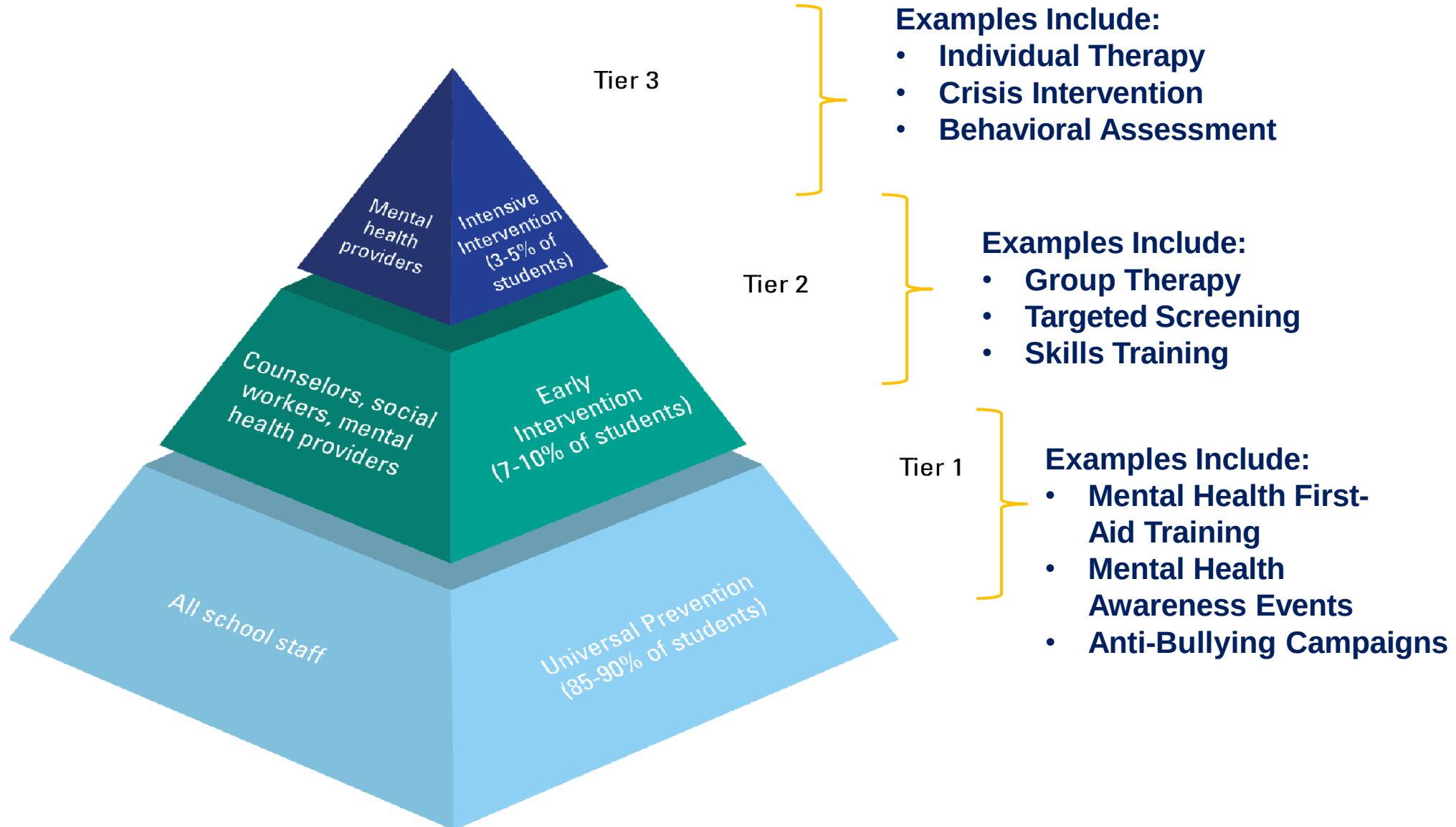
- Tier I – Universal Prevention: Schoolwide activities to promote mental health awareness (e.g., info sessions, outreach at events).
- Tier II – Targeted Early Intervention: Support for at-risk students with emerging needs (e.g., psychoeducation groups).
- Tier III – Intensive Intervention: Focused support for students with mental health disorders (e.g., crisis intervention, individual/family therapy).

“We’re fairly rural so having Apex here has helped us give the opportunity for our families to have mental health services. ... We’ve seen several kids who have academically grown over the last year because they’ve been able to have access to mental health services through Apex.”

—School partner

**83% of
parents reported
improved access
to care**

Apex Program: Apex Tiered Support Model



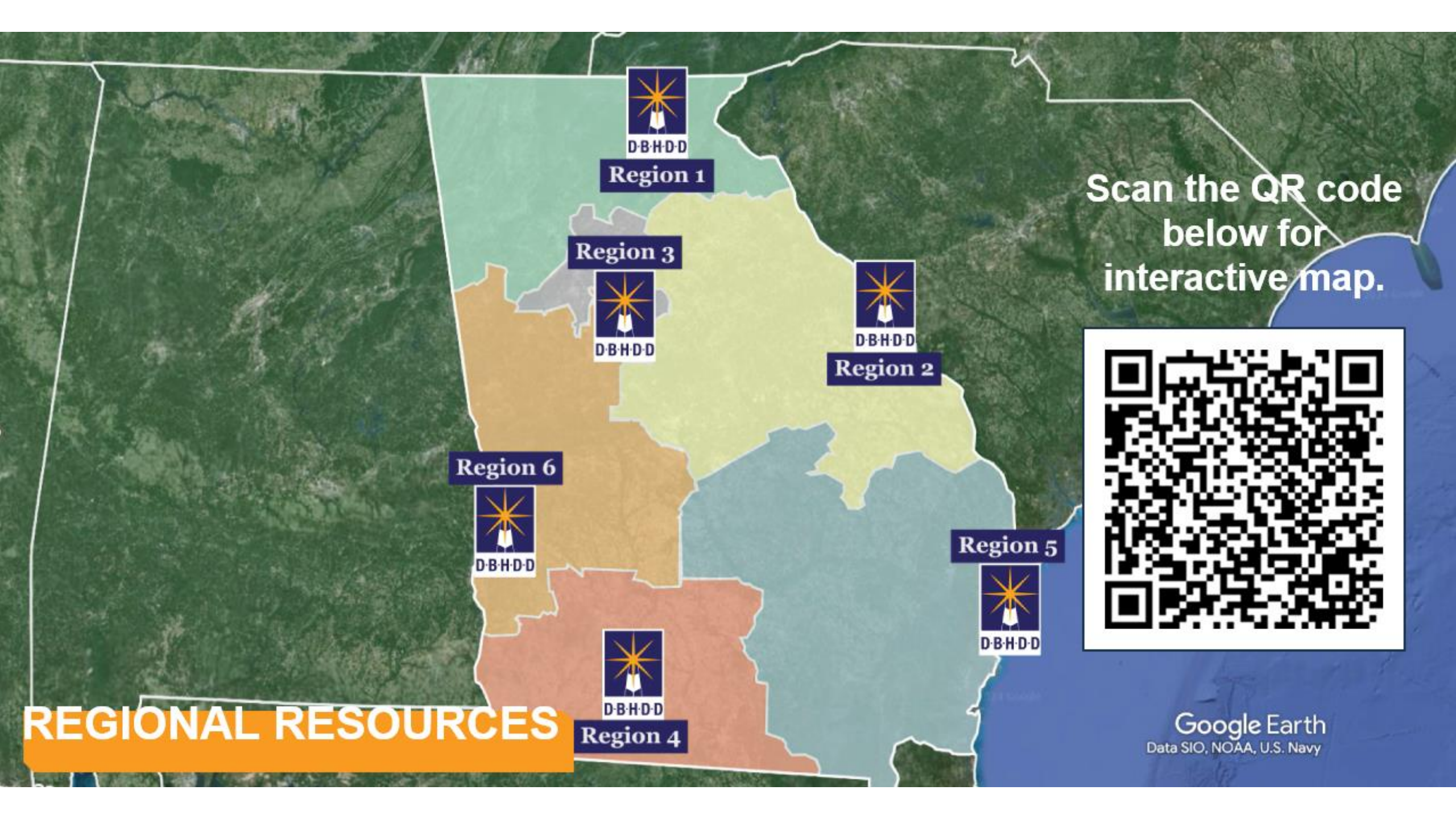
Apex Program: Looking Forward

Positions and Staffing Numbers (2023-2024 School Year)

- **Staff Turnover:** 72% of providers reported clinician turnover in APEX staff during the year.
- **Top Reasons for Turnover** included:
 - Salary
 - Workload
 - Other opportunities

Solutions

- **Supported Internship Pilot:** Leveraging a grant partnership with the COE at GSU, DBHDD has piloted a program to pay tuition for the second year of coursework for students in a clinical master's degree program in exchange for a commitment to work for APEX following graduation.
- Following the success of the pilot, a statewide supported internship program is expected to roll out in 2026, with a focus on rural areas.



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Region 1

Region 3



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Region 2

Region 6



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Region 5



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Region 4

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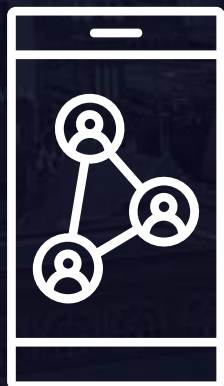
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