

# Bedford County Public Schools

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## **Bedford County Public Schools Awarded Funds from Bedford Area Educational Foundation to Implement Comprehensive Mental Health Program in Mental Health Support**

(Bedford, VA) - Bedford County Public Schools is excited to announce that it has been awarded funding graciously donated by the Stroobants Foundation, Bedford Community Health Foundation, and Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation through their partnership with the Bedford Area Educational Foundation (BAEF) to implement a comprehensive mental health program for K-12. This initiative is designed to promote mental well-being, emotional resilience, and healthy coping strategies among students, addressing a critical need in today's educational environment. Also, with the generous support of BAEF and their donors, the Coping and Support Training (CAST) program already in high schools will be expanded to include more facilitators in secondary schools where teachers can build those important relationships with students that will last through graduation and more.

The funding, provided by BAEF donors, will enable Bedford County Public Schools to enhance the mental health education programs for all grade levels, ensuring students receive consistent support and resources. This program will include Kimochis: Key to Communication, which is an interactive tool utilized by elementary school counselors that is designed to teach children to listen, speak, and act with others in positive ways, emphasizing awareness of tone of voice, body language and appropriate words when students are in an emotional moment. The Keys teach respectful social interaction, an awareness of taking responsibility for action, promote resilience and coping with social challenges, and recognize how to consider individual and others' emotional needs. The skills learned with this interactive program will promote school-home partnerships and align the school counseling curriculum division-wide to allow stronger lesson collaboration among schools. It will also support students transitioning among schools within the division by maintaining a foundational program. As students move into secondary schools, they have access to CAST, which helps youth build coping skills, enhances social support resources, and increases time spent in healthy activities in small group settings with educated facilitators and peer support.

The mental health opportunities include:

- **Unified Vocabulary:** With the addition of Kimochis to BCPS K-5 elementary counseling lessons, students across the division will use the "mixed bag of feelings" characters to establish and practice the same vocabulary to manage and describe their emotions. This will also teach students to distinguish between bullying and everyday unkind interactions. With this knowledge, students can communicate in ways that build confidence, self-esteem, and strong relationships while reducing harmful interactions. When students transition to secondary school, they will all have the same vocabulary and skills throughout the rest of their academic careers.
- **Intentional Programming:** Effective interventions in early childhood years that build social, emotional, and behavioral skills at a young age can have a positive effect on how children can problem-solve and interact with their peers later in life. With intentional early education programming, research suggests that social-emotional competencies significantly enhance school

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readiness and promote resilience and health in preteen/teen years. With the funding provided by BAEF, BCPS was able to purchase digital notebooks for students to practice the learned skills both in and out of the classroom and fund training for additional facilitators.

This initiative aligns with BCPS' commitment to fostering an educational experience that prioritizes both academic success and the overall well-being of its students. BCPS looks forward to the positive impact these programs will have on its students and the broader school community and the continued community partnerships that fund them. These programs were implemented at the beginning of the 2024-2025 School Year.

For more information about these programs, please contact Kristen Eanes, Coordinator of Communications and Community Engagement at (540) 583-1045 or [kristen.eanes@bedford.k12.va.us](mailto:kristen.eanes@bedford.k12.va.us).

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