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For Immediate Release

Contact: Jeff Leieritz
(803) 917-1592 (mobile)
communications@scdhhs.gov

SCDHHS and University of South Carolina to Support School Districts in Responding to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Crisis

COLUMBIA, S.C. Schools throughout South Carolina now have a new way to prepare teachers and other staff to support student mental health.

Psychology faculty at the University of South Carolina (UofSC) are creating the John H. Magill SC School Behavioral Health Academy (SBHA), a community of learning that will help schools build positive campus cultures and provide mental health services to students.

The SBHA will offer continuing education for school districts, mental health providers, and other youth-serving agencies across the state. Through a mix of online and in-person instruction, experts from UofSC will coach and assist schools in adopting practical, science-based approaches to support schools in improving mental health for students. The academy is designed to help schools respond to the unprecedented need for mental health services among youth.

"The child and adolescent mental health crisis, which has progressively worsened since it was announced by Surgeon General Satcher in 2000, reached a sort of crescendo in the lingering wake of the COVID-19 pandemic," said project co-director Dr. Samuel McQuillin.

Officially launching Monday, Oct. 3, the SBHA will offer two online certificate programs in school behavioral health, and the academy will tailor content to the roles and needs of learners, even those who are not formal mental health providers.

"Everyone plays a part in responding to the child and adolescent mental health crisis, from our counselors and teachers to our community mentors and bus drivers," said project director Dr. Mark Weist.

School employees can learn more and register for the courses at scsbha.org.

The SBHA is supported by a \$3.2 million grant from the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS). The SBHA complements recent policy changes implemented by the agency, which include dedicating more funding to paying and hiring school-based mental health counselors, designed to increase the number of mental health counselors supporting South Carolina schools. SCDHHS' school-based mental health services initiative, which was [formally launched](#) July 1, 2022, allows schools greater flexibility in delivering mental health services in school settings.

"Our partnership with the university, along with the increased funding we have committed that will support raising the salaries of school-based mental health counselors, will help us achieve our goal of drastically improving the ratio of counselors to students in South Carolina schools," said SCDHHS Director Robby Kerr. "The resources announced today will help to better support schools as they integrate mental health services into

their day to-day operations; and, along with SCDHHS' efforts to incentivize more counselors to provide mental-health services in South Carolina schools, support increased access to these vital services for children across the state."

The SBHA will train personnel in creating safe schools, responding to crises, science-based approaches to counseling, whole-school approaches to preventing mental health and behavioral problems, among many other topics. The SBHA's certificate program and professional coaching will help ensure these changes are grounded in best practice, and that every provider has access to professional development. Dr. Weist noted training experiences and coaching will evolve based on the preferences and needs of South Carolina communities, which are being evaluated through a statewide needs assessment.

About the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services provides healthcare benefits to more than one million South Carolinians. Its mission is to purchase the most health for our citizens in need at the least possible cost to the taxpayer.

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