



Promoting wellness and recovery

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Ohio Awards \$9.1M to Strengthen Early Childhood Mental Health Services

COLUMBUS – In an effort to promote healthy social and emotional development and school readiness among children age six and younger, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) today announced \$9.1 million in funding that will benefit 75 counties through the agency’s “Whole Child Matters: Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Initiative.”

“The foundations of sound mental health are built early in life,” said OhioMHAS Director Tracy Plouck. “Early experiences — including children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers — interact with genes to shape the architecture of the developing brain. Disruptions in this developmental process can impede a child’s capacities for learning and relating to others, with lifelong implications.”

The funding calls for the addition of up to 64 mental health consultants who will work with teachers, staff and families of at-risk children in preschools and other early learning settings. Plans also include establishing a centralized intake process and providing for a small cadre of trainers who will oversee professional development services statewide.

Counselors will work with early learning programs such as childcare, Head Start and preschool to help develop a strong mental health foundation for children in an effort to reduce pre-school expulsions. Services rendered will include: on-site interventions and child/family-focused technical assistance to parents, teachers and staff; resources for parents, training and professional development.

“Our goal is to engage at-risk children as early as possible to reduce and eliminate preschool to kindergarten expulsions and make a lasting, positive difference that contributes to a child’s future success,” said Dr. Valerie Alloy, staff lead for early childhood mental health initiatives at OhioMHAS. “The proposals we’ve funded reflect the Department’s commitment to supporting healthy social and emotional development among young children as these are critical components of school readiness.”

The expanded funding will also support a statewide centralized intake component in which , pre-school and kindergarten teachers can call for an in person consultation, and up to seven master trainers to provide statewide training and technical assistance to early childhood mental health counselors and consultants.

The funding from this initiative began as pilot in the \$70 million Early Learning Challenge Grant that Ohio received due to Governor Kasich’s reformist vision for early childhood. Based on pilot outcomes and information about brain development in young children, Governor Kasich provided \$5 million

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dollars a year in the SFY 2016-17 biennium budget to expand the grant's pilot program and provide these important services to improve kindergarten readiness and help to set children on a path for success.

“Governor Kasich has been committed to helping all Ohioans achieve their full potential and by addressing children’s mental health and wellness we can help today’s youth reach their goals and make our state stronger,” said Plouck.

Dr. Wendy Grove, the Director of the Office for Early Learning and School Readiness at the Ohio Department of Education said, “We are excited about the support these dollars will bring to early care and education settings to ensure that Ohio’s parents, children, and early childhood professionals are able to maximize Kindergarten readiness.”

Learn more about Ohio’s early childhood mental health initiatives at:
<http://mha.ohio.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=279>. Please refer to the attached map and project excerpt sheet for more details on funded projects.

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