



## **FHSD School-Based Mental Health Partnership Changes FAQ Sheet**

July 31, 2024

### **What kind of school-based mental health resources are available to students?**

Forest Hills School District is committed to providing a holistic academic experience where students are supported in and out of the classroom. The district's goal is to help each student reach his or her highest potential by meeting their needs academically, socially and psychologically. Mental health counseling services are available in all nine schools through a strong partnership with Child Focus. There are also a wide-variety of support services built into the school experience that are intended to help all students develop positive mental health practices and support anyone who may be struggling, but for whom mental health counseling might not be the right option. You can learn more about some of those programs [here](#).

### **Why is it important to offer access to school-based mental health treatment?**

By offering access to services during the school day, it allows students to receive care in the comfort of a natural setting, decreasing barriers such as transportation and busy family schedules. When barriers are eliminated for families, it increases the follow-through with services. Additionally, providing school-based mental health care allows for an integrated approach where students, families, school staff and therapists work together collaboratively to meet the needs of the individual child. It is important to note that the level of care is individualized for each student with an emphasis on ensuring they find meeting times that allow them to keep up with all the critical components of their education in school.

### **What are the key changes to the district's partnership with Child Focus?**

Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, the district's partnership with Child Focus will shift from one that was previously available only to students who met criteria for an official referral to an open referral process. That means that any parent, or any student with the parent's permission,

can request an appointment with Child Focus if they believe mental health therapy would be beneficial to the student. While the previous partnership was limited in the number of students able to be served, the new partnership will expand access to care to all students or families who may be interested. Families who receive school-based therapy through Child Focus will utilize their personal health insurance coverage to pay for treatment moving forward.

## **Why will the partnership with Child Focus be changing?**

Based on a recent needs assessment conducted by MindPeace, a local mental health organization that FHSD partners with to evaluate and improve its approach to wellness, the district knows there is a demonstrated need to expand access to school-based therapy and other services for students across the school district. Having an open access system of care can lead to improved academic outcomes, increased attendance and decreased disciplinary infractions. Mental illness affects approximately one in five children with 50% of all mental illness beginning before the age of 14 (NAMI 2024). Access to services can be especially difficult for youth with many families facing barriers in accessing community-based care. This makes it vital for schools to offer access to this support embedded within the structure of the school day.

## **What needs were identified that make this change necessary in supporting youth mental health?**

The needs assessment conducted by MindPeace involved district stakeholders including staff members from the elementary, middle and high schools, students from the high schools, and all parents/guardians. Small group meetings with staff and surveys of staff, students and parents were completed to gain their valuable insight. The results indicated that FHSD student needs are similar to those nationally. Students are demonstrating higher levels of anxiety, depression and ADHD, for example. Additionally, FHSD is a high performing school district, which can lead to competition, self-pressure and perfectionism which may increase rates of youth mental health challenges. Stakeholder groups expressed the need for open access to school-based mental health treatment, allowing families to make decisions that are in the best interest of their individual child or family circumstance. This requires a change to the previous agreement, which included guardrails on who could access school-based care.

## **What will the scope of services be in the new system?**

FHSD works in partnership with students and families. Services will only be provided with student and parent consent. Child Focus, the district's long-serving mental health treatment partner, will provide services at each school by a licensed mental health therapist. Those services will include mental health assessment, individual and family counseling, and group counseling for topics such as depression, anxiety and skill building. If needed, and always with parent permission, medication management will also be available through a physician or nurse practitioner.

## **How will families access services?**

Families will be able to refer their child directly to the on-site mental health therapist at each school. School staff, who will be trained in the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, may also recommend to families that they access services provided by Child Focus. Services will be available and provided on-site at each school with the student's and parent's permission. Services will also be offered in the community setting for families who prefer an outpatient model of care.

## **What happens to families who were being served under the previous partnership?**

Families who are currently being served have already been notified of the changes, which go into effect on August 1, 2024. Their child's care will continue through the end of July under the current agreement, and those families will have the ability to continue their treatment under the updated partnership with Child Focus. The District will set aside funds for families with a significant need using criteria for consideration. In general, families will be asked to utilize their insurance to access school-based mental health services. If families face barriers, the district will connect them with its partner, MindPeace, to work confidentially to find the care they need for their child.

## **What are the next steps?**

If families would like to enroll their student in school-based mental health services prior to the start of the school year, parents and guardians can reach out directly to Child Focus for information on registration paperwork by calling (513) 752-1555, emailing [info@child-focus.org](mailto:info@child-focus.org) or visiting its office located at 4633-A Aicholtz Rd, Cincinnati, OH 45244. Upon completion of registration paperwork, parents and guardians will be contacted for an intake appointment based on clinician availability.

### ***About Child Focus***

The mission of Child Focus is to join with communities in improving the quality of life for children, families and adults. Child Focus is a leader in the industries of early childhood and behavioral health by creating responsive and innovative programs in collaboration with individuals, families, community agencies and institutions. Our early care and education, prevention and treatment programs improve coping mechanisms, provide support, promote school readiness and success and encourage growth and self-sufficiency for the children, families and adults in our community. Learn more by visiting <https://www.child-focus.org/>

### ***About MindPeace***

MindPeace is a non-profit organization working with close to 240 schools and 23 community Mental Health agencies across Southwest Ohio. MindPeace works together with community

partners to continue the development and implementation of a seamless system of mental health support for children and adolescents, with a focus on school-based, stakeholder-selected partnerships. MindPeace is dedicated to fostering systemic improvements to children's mental health by increasing access to care and the quality of services provided. Learn more by visiting <https://mindpeacecincinnati.com/>