



County Of Dane
Office Of The County Executive

Joe Parisi
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Dane County School Mental Health Support Program Set to Expand

Report: “Building Bridges” Helped 1,900 Kids, Families in 11 Dane County School Districts in Recent Years

A Dane County funded school-based mental health support program that has served hundreds of young people and their families will expand this year, County Executive Joe Parisi announced today. Parisi announced the creation of and first funding for “Dane County Building Bridges” a decade ago this fall, and since then the initiative has grown to 11 local school districts with an annual county budget allocation of over \$1.9 million. Local school districts partner to financially support the program.

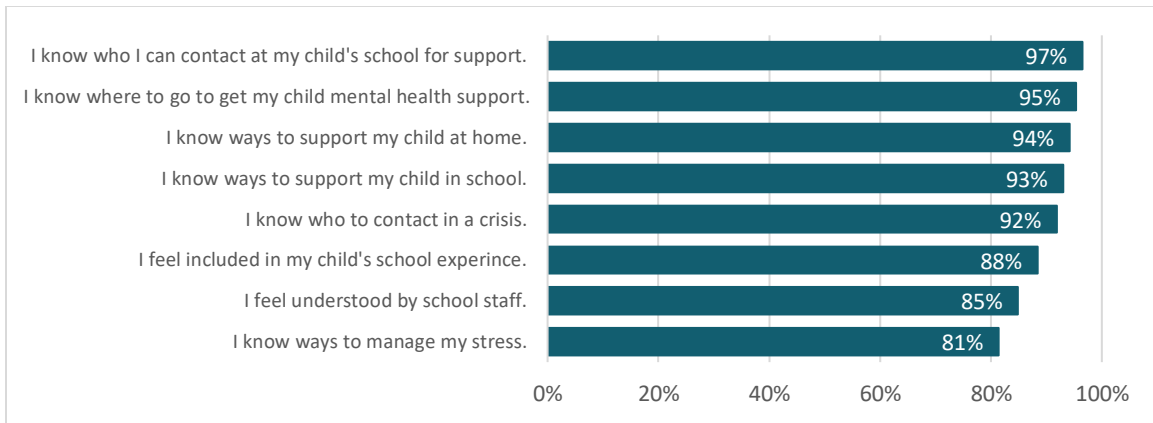
With new dollars in this year’s county budget, both the Sun Prairie Area School District and the Madison Metropolitan School District will add another Building Bridges staff team to their networks, expanding the program’s reach to even more students.

“Anxiety, depression, and other behavioral health needs remain great among an increasing number of young people,” County Executive Joe Parisi said. “We launched this effort around a decade ago to intervene and focus on prevention, reducing the downstream impacts of mental illness which can impact academic performance and be a barrier to personal and professional success.”

Parisi first started Building Bridges as a pilot project with the Verona, Sun Prairie, and Madison school districts. As the model succeeded and schools saw the many benefits of having these mental health professionals in schools—including improved classroom learning and better liaisons between support at school and home—additional districts joined the partnership.

New data from Building Bridges indicates the program is seeing successful outcomes go beyond the time students and families participate in the program. The percentage of young people who have significant functional impairment at the time they start working with Building Bridges mental health professionals to when they leave the program continues to improve. Recent data, however, also shows those improvements are still being seen six months after completion. For example, 76% of Building Bridges participants in the 2021-22 school year were considered to have significant impairment at the start of their treatment. Assessments taken six months after completion of the program showed that number was down in the 40-45% range. More than one in three students and families reported sustaining overall improvement even six months after departing Building Bridges.

Additionally, a survey was done of parents who had students participate in Building Bridges:



Mental health among young people continues to be an increasing challenge. The most recent Dane County Youth Assessment found almost one in four 7th and 8th graders felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks. One in five had thoughts of taking their lives. 36% said they always or often felt nervous, anxious, or on edge.

“Since partnering with Building Bridges in 2019, we have seen a significant impact on our ability to meet the full needs of our students and families,” said Monona Grove Superintendent Dan Olson. “Our students’ needs are only growing more complex, and we are grateful for the critical link Building Bridges provides so that our students and families can connect with services in our area and work toward long-term success at school and in our community.”

“We know the need is great when it comes to helping our young people navigate today’s realities,” Parisi said. “We also know programs like Building Bridges help meet the challenge of the moment, and I’m grateful for the continued support and participation of our partner Dane County schools who share our commitment to this next generation and their families.”

The following Dane County School Districts participate in the School-Based Mental Health Program known as Building Bridges:

- Deforest Area School District
- Madison Metropolitan School District
- Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District
- Monona Grove School District
- Mount Horeb Area School District
- Oregon School District
- Stoughton Area School District
- Sun Prairie Area School District
- Verona Area School District
- Waunakee Community School District
- Wisconsin Heights School District

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