

# Supplemental Budget Request

Health

Community Health

Suppl ID # 4984

Fund 1853

Cost Center 18538505

Originator: Joe Fuller

Year 1 2025

Add'l FTE ☐

Priority 1

**Name of Request:** Whatcom County School Districts-Behavioral Health

**X**

**Department Head Signature (Required on Hard Copy Submission)**

**Date**

<b>Costs:</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Object Description</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>
	7210	Intergovernmental professional	\$1,500,000
	<b>Request Total</b>		<b>\$1,500,000</b>

## 1a. Description of request:

Health and Community Services requests expenditure authority to use Behavioral Health sales tax for school-based programs and staffing for youth mental health and substance use disorder services.

A request was approved by council in September of 2023 and is part of three-year initiative to support schools in the development and operation of mental health supports for students, parents and teachers. Additionally, WCHCS has historically funded substance use disorder services in the schools and is preparing for 2025-2026 contracts to begin in September.

The funding priorities for use of Behavioral Health sales tax reserves (expansion contracts) were facilitated through meetings with Superintendents and relevant staff from every school district to lay out the funding opportunity and its limitations, describe allowable uses, and intended impact for students, teachers, and families. Each school district submitted their requests for funding in proposals. The school district proposals were reviewed by the Public Health Advisory Board, Behavioral Health Advisory Committee, and the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force Behavioral Health Sub-Committee. Health and Community Services provided these recommendations and the funding strategy to council in August of 2023.

Given the significant strain on behavioral health fund (council briefing forthcoming), this request provides budget authority to pay for a portion of existing contract commitments and will provide room to begin negotiations on the regular cycle of substance use disorder contracts. We expect to bring a supplemental budget request forward in July in the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Fund to provide additional revenue and will be continuing to work with the department on ongoing spending reductions.

The Health Department is working with the Executive's Office and Finance to update the inventory of services. Reductions to stabilize the fund will be necessary as we undertake budgeting in 2026.

## 1b. Primary customers:

Students, teachers, and families in Whatcom County.

## 2. Problem to be solved:

Youth and adults suffer from a variety of behavioral health concerns including anxiety, depression, and substance use. The magnitude of challenges associated with youth mental health in Whatcom County is clearly demonstrated in the Healthy Youth Survey 2023 results, where nearly two in three 10th graders reported feeling anxious and one in six reported making a plan for suicide in the past year. Additionally, about 29% of 10th graders reported depressive feelings in the past year. Mental health is a public health priority and impacts many areas over the life course.

## 3a. Options / Advantages:

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Schools offer an opportunity to provide support to youth and families struggling with mental health challenges and substance use. Many districts serve youth and families in geographical locations where little or no services exist, or where needs still greatly exceed capacity. Whatcom County school districts have requested direct financial support to provide programs and services to students, teachers and families to address these challenges. Each school district request is unique to the district's needs.

#### **3b. Cost savings:**

Research shows that investing in youth and family mental health greatly benefits the community, including higher graduation rates, lower incarceration rates and lower healthcare and emergency services costs. Cost-benefit estimates also show that effective school-based programs can save \$18 for every \$1 spent on these programs.

#### **4a. Outcomes:**

Funds will be put into contracts and programming that improves youth mental health, increases access to behavioral health supports for students, teachers, and families, and reduces behavioral health crises for students. A key anticipated outcome of these funds is reducing health disparities among students, teachers, and families in Whatcom County.

#### **4b. Measures:**

Specific outcomes are tied to individual contracts and scopes of work but also include outcomes for reducing risk for poor mental health and substance use, increasing parent connections and communication, and improving youth school performance (e.g. grades, attendance, and behaviors). Services will be measured through reports that are submitted bi-annually.

#### **5a. Other Departments/Agencies:**

No.

#### **5b. Name the person in charge of implementation and what they are responsible for:**

N/A

#### **6. Funding Source:**

Behavioral Health Fund.