



# Oak Park Elementary School District 97

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**TO:** Dr. Ushma Shah, Superintendent

**FROM:** Dr. Ebony Lofton, Chief Learning Innovation Officer

**CC:** Dr. Sheila Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations

**SUBJECT:** Continuation of Mental Health Services Provided to Students by DePaul University

**DATE:** October 10, 2023

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## Background

The Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township is responsible for planning, developing, coordinating, evaluating, and funding mental health, substance abuse, and developmental disability services in Oak Park Township. In its FY20 Strategic Plan, CMHB identified six priority areas, including addressing the underutilization of existing behavioral health services and addressing the gaps in those areas. In February 2018, CMHB in partnership with District 97 issued a special request for proposals to provide services that address the mental health needs of 6th through 8th-grade students and their families in District 97. The goal of this pilot project was to develop a program model that meets the unique needs of sixth through eighth-grade students who have complex behavioral health and social needs and who require care coordination linking them and their families to appropriate levels of treatment and services.

Through that competitive process, CMHB awarded seed funding to DePaul University in 2019 for \$62,830 for the Mindfulness Matters Program (MMP). CMHB continued funding in 2020 for \$70,000. Funding for the project jumped in 2021 (\$228,334) and 2022 (\$292,533) to pay for the addition of a care coordinator as well as for the expansion from the middle schools to two elementary schools. CMHB is requesting a cost-sharing of the Mindfulness Matters Program (MMP) for the 2023-2024 school year of \$56,250.00

## Program Summary

The Mindfulness Matters Program (MMP) creates the capacity to address the mental health needs of elementary and middle-school-aged students and families and to strengthen the caregiving system around them. The program will leverage the evidence-based Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model that offers universal (Tier I), group (Tier II), and individualized (TIER III) interventions of increasing intensity. MTSS ensures the efficient use of limited resources with the idea that many children can be served through universal approaches that teach them and their caregivers about emotional health and those that are at increasing risk or symptom severity will utilize more intensive, individualized service.

Tier I (universal) includes training for D97 staff and parents in skills needed to create responsive and supportive environments for youth who are struggling with mental health concerns. This will be achieved by offering D97 schools a menu of workshops geared towards helping to strengthen the care-giving system (staff and parents/guardians). Workshop goals include supporting students who are struggling with anxiety, depression, and executive functioning (ADD/ADHD) difficulties. Tier I training will occur during the school day when geared towards school staff or after school when geared towards families. Family training will also be integrated into family therapy sessions which will occur either at the school or in home settings.

Tier II (medium intensity) features group services designed to provide a higher level of support for those students who are demonstrating clinically significant symptoms of anxiety, depression, or inattention. MMP is an adaptable, modular approach to teaching mindfulness to children and teens. The program is designed to be implemented in a variety of settings and schools and for kids and teens ages 8-18 with a broad range of backgrounds and concerns, including mental health, learning, emotional, and or behavioral issues with which they may be struggling. This 4-week, open-group format is being provided as a lower-level entry to services prior to enrollment in the more intensive 12-week MBCT-C program.

Tier III (high intensity/individualized) services include Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy groups and individual and family counseling (that can be provided in school or home-based settings). The group programming will include 12-week groups using the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Children (MBCT-C) curriculum. The curriculum was originally developed for children struggling with anxiety and depression but has since been adapted to help children who experience difficulty with inattention. The goals of MBCT-C are to enhance emotional resilience; promote positive changes in how the child relates to their own thoughts and emotions; learn to distinguish thoughts that are judgmental from those that simply describe one's experience; recognize that judgments often escalate mood disturbances which can trigger maladaptive behaviors; cultivate self-acceptance and acceptance of those things that cannot be changed; and expand awareness of personal emotional and behavioral choices. The MBCT-C group curriculum is a blend of psycho-education, experiential learning, parent-interviews, and parent review session(s). Parent review sessions can be offered at the school in a group format or individually at home and at convenient after-school and evening hours. Tier III services will be geared toward those students and families who need a higher level of individualized care. Treatment will be highly individualized but will draw upon evidence-based approaches such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and parent-child therapy.

Care coordination services will also be provided to D97 families so that families are connected to both school- and community-based supports. The Community Mental Health Board will conduct research this year to determine the efficacy of the model.

## **Financial Impact**

For the 2023-2024 school year, the cost for the district's portion of the Mindfulness Matters program is \$56,250. The ESSER III grant is projected to be the funding source.