



Kate Harrison  
Vice Mayor, District 4

CONSENT CALENDAR  
May 31, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
 From: Vice Mayor Harrison and Councilmember Hahn  
 Subject: Budget Referral: Fund Mental Health Wellness Support and Services Coordinator at the Berkeley High School Health Center

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the FY 23 and FY 24 Annual Budget Process \$350,000 to provide a coordinator position to deliver mental health wellness support and services to the City-run Berkeley High School (BHS) Mental Health Center, and to expand services and training as appropriate, consistent with the May 5, 2022 Council action to reimagine public safety. This includes:

1. Counseling services for students experiencing depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideations, etc.;
2. Teacher training for mental health awareness;
3. Facilitator/support resources to assist with coordination and scheduling of services.

CURRENT SITUATION AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

In response to a recent tragic incident involving a BHS student and ongoing insufficient mental health services and training within the Berkeley Unified School District, concerned students have led a petition with nearly 500 signatures calling for urgent mental health resources. Many students indicate that there are obstacles to communicating with teachers and counselors about mental health issues. Students report a sense of isolation, perpetuating personal and academic stress. The decline of students' mental health is a national phenomenon (see below).

HHCS leadership confirms providing an additional position at the City-supported Health Center would enhance student mental health. The City already provides BHS with limited counseling services through the Health Center, but the resources are not consistently available or accessible and teaching staff are not provided with regular training to identify signs of mental health needs and to help connect students to resources as appropriate. It is in the public interest to fund a City Mental Health Coordinator in the BHS Health Center to facilitate services and training, develop a mental health prevention and awareness program to promote mental health and resilience, and to address emerging challenges.

## BACKGROUND

The mental health crisis among youth has increased dramatically in the past few years. A recent journal study found that between 1999 and 2016 national suicide rates have increased 30%.<sup>1</sup> Young people have been disproportionately represented in this tragic trend.

During the height of the pandemic, emergency room visits related to suspected suicide attempts rose 50% among girls 12-17.<sup>2</sup> A 2022 survey found that almost 50% of LGBTQ youth contemplated suicide in the last year.<sup>3</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people” and “[f]or youth ages 10-14, suicide is the second leading cause of death.”<sup>4</sup> Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for college students.<sup>5</sup>

Although the overall suicide rate among people aged 10–24 was statistically stable from 2000 to 2007, the CDC found that suicides increased 57.4% in 2018.<sup>6</sup> The New York Times also recently reported that mental health disorders are beginning to eclipse binge drinking, drunken driving, teenage pregnancy and smoking. In 2019, “13 percent of adolescents reported having a major depressive episode.”

The recent loss of a student at BHS caused a significant number of students trauma and grief. Many of these students are seeking support and needed time to process their emotions. Unfortunately, many students report that Berkeley High School does not have sufficient resources available to respond properly to this and other similar incidents. Students report that many teachers were unprepared following the tragedy, and did not adjust academic work appropriately. As a result, students were forced to suppress their emotional needs to focus on their school work.

Even prior to the recent incident, students reported a scarcity of mental health support. Students report that there are few counselors and very limited drop-in appointments available and that counselors are focused on academic concerns. Wait list for mental

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah M. Stone, ScD et al, “Trends in State Suicide Rates — United States, 1999–2016 and Circumstances Contributing to Suicide — 27 States, 2015,” 2018, [https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/897984\\_1](https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/897984_1).

<sup>2</sup> Aria Bendix, “Adolescents accounted for larger share of suicides in many states in 2020,” April 25, 2022, NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/teen-suicides-increased-many-states-pandemic-rcna25825>

<sup>3</sup> Meghan Roos, “Nearly Half of LGBTQ Youth Considered Suicide in Last Year: Survey,” May 4, 2022, Newsweek, <https://www.newsweek.com/nearly-half-lgbtq-youth-considered-suicide-last-year-survey-1703607>.

<sup>4</sup> “Disparities in Suicide,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 3, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html>

<sup>5</sup> “University and college campus suicide prevention,” American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, <https://afsp.org/university-and-college-campus-suicide-prevention>.

<sup>6</sup> Sally C. Curtin, M.A., “State Suicide Rates Among Adolescents and Young Adults Aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2018” September 11, 2020, National Vital Statistics Reports, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr69/nvsr-69-11-508.pdf>

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health services are weeks long. Students are unable to receive proper support and are left to manage on their own.

An informal needs assessment survey conducted by BHS students reveals:

- 68% of students report that they have to put in a lot of effort to receive help.
- 57% of students stated they would feel more supported if there were more on-site therapists.
- Only 17% of students reported teachers/counselors/staff checking in on them regarding their mental health.

Following the recent Berkeley tragedy, students assembled the “Wellness and Support Project.” Their plan is primarily to implement mental health training for both teachers and students at BHS. This will increase general knowledge, decrease stigma, and create a supportive community on campus. They also seek an expansion in the availability of psychologists and therapists for students at BHS, as well as a Mental Health Coordinator to coordinate such trainings and services. The group’s recommendations follow extensive research, and numerous meetings with administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members.

The BHS Health Center is operated by the City of Berkeley HHCS and offers first aid, medical, health education, youth development and counseling/therapy services. The Mental Health Coordinator position will support the provision of critical mental health aid for students and staff at Berkeley High School, and provide better access to urgent and equitable health services.

There are currently no immediate plans considered by the City or School District that would sufficiently address the urgent needs of students and teachers. While on April 22, 2022, the Berkeley City Council approved the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission revenue grant for \$2,500,000 (\$500,000 for each of five years) for Coordination and Provision of Mental Health Services in Berkeley Unified School District, this money was allocated to the BUSD school district in its entirety (not BHS), and is still being processed. City staff expect much of it will be dedicated to supporting the middle schools. Even with this new funding, there is no guarantee of a position within the BHS Health Center to coordinate such services.

Having someone specifically at BHS (the District’s largest school with students at a particularly volatile age) who will build a system of behavioral health supports for students, and that also involves teachers, staff, and families, will create more robust and sustainable supports specifically for BHS. In addition, since coordinating teacher and staff training can be challenging, having someone dedicated to this function will make a significant difference in supporting teacher and staff awareness of emerging mental health issues.

This budget item, informed by discussion with HHCS leadership, will fund a coordinator position to leverage existing and new funding to expand BHS services, and organize

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various stakeholders and partners to deliver upon the current critical wellbeing and mental health needs of students and educators.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Impact on General Fund of \$350,000.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No discernable impact.

CONTACT PERSON

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