

Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: NJ DCF to Issue RFP for New Statewide Student Support Services Network

11/16/2022

NJ4S Will Make Mental Wellness and Prevention Services Available in Schools and Community Settings

TRENTON - After several weeks of public and stakeholder input, and in response to the youth mental health crisis nationally and in New Jersey, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJ DCF) today announced the roll-out of a Request for Proposals (RFP) to advance the launch of the NJ Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S) network of integrated prevention and intervention programming for New Jersey's 1.4 million students and their families. In addition to proceeding with the creation of the new NJ4S model, in order to minimize disruption to students already receiving services, the Administration will also maintain the current SBYS funding in Governor Murphy's FY2024 State Budget proposal.

"As a firm believer in the importance of addressing the mental health needs of our youth, I understand just how essential it is to provide young people with the support they need during these challenging times," **said Governor Phil Murphy**. "In connection with the announcement and launch of the groundbreaking NJ4S program, my Administration has listened to educators, students, community members and other interested parties about this proposal and appreciate the input we have received. We look forward to continuing to hear from communities and work with stakeholders to advance this new model of care and provide critical services to students in every corner of our state."

"We're excited about the healing potential of NJ4S, offering statewide access to mental and emotional wellness services to all students," **said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "The launch of the RFP is the next step in an ambitious but achievable timeline to stand up regional administrative 'hubs' and local service 'spokes' for the 2023 – 2024 school year. We have a very strong community-based provider network in NJ, and I look forward to reviewing the proposals we receive from the field, to move one step closer to making NJ4S a reality on the ground for all New Jersey students."

Earlier this fall, NJ DCF unveiled the NJ4S Concept – a first-in-the-nation, statewide student mental wellness support infrastructure to address a surging youth mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the proposed plan, tiered, evidence-based prevention and intervention services to help address and prevent issues such as suicide, teen pregnancy, substance use, and bullying will be administered and organized through 15 regional hubs statewide. Services will be delivered locally to students in schools and locally-based trusted sites, such as libraries, community centers, and more.

Advisory Boards, comprised of students, parents, school officials, community and civic leaders, and others, will play a role in helping to guide hubs and ensuring they meet the unique needs of the community without replicating or duplicating existing supports.

NJ4S was designed as an evolution of the existing 86 School-Based Youth Services (SBYS) programs, funded in whole or in part by DCF, to offer statewide reach and the delivery of wellness and prevention services. More information about the NJ4S Concept and background and materials which supported the development of the concept can be found at <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/nj4sconcept.html> (<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/nj4sconcept.html>).

Prior to and after announcing the NJ4S concept, NJ DCF participated in more than a dozen stakeholder and legislative meetings to introduce and receive feedback about the proposal. Additionally, DCF released a concept paper and solicited public feedback from October 7, 2022 through October 21, 2022 – extending the initial window for public feedback by a week to ensure that every voice and viewpoint was heard.

As indicated in the Department's initial announcement, DCF remains committed to ensuring continuity of services for students currently participating in the existing SBYS programs as the State transitions to this new model. In response to public feedback about minimizing disruption to these students, the Administration is committing to maintaining current SBYS funding in Governor Murphy's FY2024 State Budget proposal.

To create consistency and ensure more thorough data collection among all providers, current SBYS programs will receive new contracts for July 1 with standardized reporting requirements, monitoring requirements, and program expectations.

The NJ4S RFP will be posted to the DCF website within the next two weeks, and bidders will be able to submit their proposals to operate one of the new, regional hubs. Bids are expected to be due by February 1, with awards announced in March and funds disbursed in April to begin to stand up the hubs staffing and infrastructure through the end of the spring and summer of 2023.

"The NJ4S Network is intended to meet an unfulfilled need in youth mental health and wellbeing, offering a comprehensive and coordinated array of services – and connections to services – to every student and their family in New Jersey," **said Sanford Starr, NJ DCF Assistant Commissioner of Family and Community Partnerships, which oversees the SBYS programming and will oversee the NJ4S network**. "We look forward to receiving thoughtful and innovative proposals to help us launch the NJ4S network with a strong start to support youth mental wellness in New Jersey."

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
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