



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

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Governor Shapiro Hosts Roundtable Discussion on Mental Health with Students and Faculty, Highlights Proposed Budget Investments in PA Schools During Visit to Erie County Junior and Senior High School

The Governor met with students and counselors to hear firsthand about their mental health challenges and shared how his 2024-25 budget proposal would invest \$100 million to improve mental health services in K-12 schools.

The Governor's 2024-25 budget proposal would continue that historic progress with a nearly \$1.1 billion increase in basic education funding, building on the work of the Basic Education Funding Commission.



Erie, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** visited Iroquois Jr./Sr. High School for a roundtable discussion on student mental health and highlighted his [2024-25 budget's proposed investments](#) in K-12 education, including mental health resources for Pennsylvania students, schools, and counties.

The Governor's 2024-25 budget proposal would deliver **\$1.1 billion** in additional funding for public schools, **\$100 million** in mental health funding for K-12 schools to

support students and staff, and a **\$20 million** increase this year in base county funding for community-based mental health services.

“Our kids are asking for our help – and we need to show up for them here in Erie County and in every school and every community across Pennsylvania. For too long, there has been a stigma around mental health, but that’s changing with this generation – and I am ready to work with them to find solutions,” said **Governor Josh Shapiro**. “That’s why, in my first budget, I fought for and delivered \$100 million for mental health funding in our schools. This year, I’m calling for another \$100 million investment in mental health in schools – so districts like Iroquois can continue to invest in the mental health resources that make such a big difference for our kids. These investments in Pennsylvania students are critical – and I look forward to continuing to work together to get this done and deliver for the students and families across our Commonwealth who need this help.”

In his [first budget](#), Governor Shapiro made historic investments in our public schools, students, and teachers, and empowered parents to put their children in the best position to succeed by delivering the [largest increase in K-12 basic education funding in Pennsylvania history](#), delivering [universal free breakfast](#) for 1.7 million students, and securing \$100 million for student mental health.

The Governor’s [2024-25 budget proposal](#) builds on that historic progress by delivering **\$1.1 billion** in additional basic education funding for public schools, as well as additional funding including:

- **\$300 million** in sustainable funding for environmental repair projects in school buildings.
- Continuing an annual **\$100 million** in mental health funding for K-12 schools to support students and staff.
- A continuing **\$50 million** annual investment in school safety and security improvements.
- A **\$50 million** increase for special education funding to ensure school districts have the basic resources necessary to provide special education services to students with disabilities and special needs.

The Governor's proposed budget would also increase county funding for community-based mental health services by an additional **\$20 million** this year and calls for additional funds in successive years, reaching an overall increase of **\$60 million** per year increase by 2025-26.

“As a former teacher, I understand that students today face pressures that we did not have when we were in school. As a legislator, I hear from Superintendents, Principals, and teachers that there is an overwhelming uptick in student mental health issues,” said **Representative Robert Merski**. “Governor Shapiro’s investments in mental health for our students are critical, necessary, and timely. I’m proud to support our students by supporting Governor Shapiro’s investments in student mental health.”

“I would like to welcome Governor Shapiro to my district and especially to the Iroquois School District. We are fighting very hard for additional support dollars in the Governor’s upcoming budget for education and also a substantial increase in funding for mental health,” said **Representative Patrick Harkins**. “Sadly, after the pandemic many people – especially young people – are facing so many challenges and difficulties in their lives and we owe it to our students to provide them with the resources they so desperately need and deserve. I’ve worked closely with Superintendent Shane Murray for many years on the mental health components of education and he has opened my eyes on a number of things we can and must do differently in these challenging times. I appreciate Governor Shapiro coming up to the region and his unwavering commitment to education, our students and the community.”

For the 2023-24 school year, the Iroquois School District [was awarded a \\$113,895 Mental Health Award grant](#) from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to provide school-based mental health and behavioral health supports, including counselors and resources for students. In the 2023-24 budget, Governor Shapiro secured the **\$100 million** in funding that underscores the PCCD’s Mental Health grants.

“Nothing keeps me up at night more than knowing we have students in need of mental health services but lack the resources to provide them. This matter significantly impacts not only our students but also our teachers and their families, placing immense stress on our staff and posing genuine safety concerns for both the students in need and their classmates,” said **Iroquois School District Superintendent Shane Murray**. “Governor Shapiro has consistently championed both school safety and mental health services. His 2024/2025 budget proposal includes increased funding for school districts and Pennsylvania counties to address the shortage of mental health services available to students in need. His visit demonstrates his commitment to addressing the failures of the mental health system, not only in Erie County but throughout the Commonwealth.”

In Erie County alone, a 2023 Pennsylvania Youth [survey](#) showed that 41.5 percent of students reported feeling sad or depressed most days in the past year, a number higher than the Commonwealth’s average.

“According to the 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, 37% of Pennsylvania students surveyed in grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 reported feeling sad or depressed most days in the past 12 months. In Erie County, 15% of students surveyed reported they planned suicide, while 6% reported they attempted suicide,” said **Maria L. Modzelewski, Ed.S., Director of Special Education at the Iroquois School District**. “Each day, educators, counselors, and administrators find themselves on the front lines, responding to students in mental health crises. As a society, we must respond to the needs of our school systems, to ensure that essential resources are provided to nurture the next generation's success.”

Governor Shapiro has always advocated for mental health support for students – as Attorney General, he started [Safe2Say Something](#), an anonymous tip reporting system for students that has seen over 100,000 tips, and his budget proposal will help ensure every Pennsylvanian student can receive the support they need.

“Mental health is a common thread that we all experience. Recognizing that we are not alone in our struggles can allow us to come together and help one another,” **said Iroquois School District student Lexi Conti-Windle**. “Creating a safe space to share our thoughts and feelings with trained professionals can provide students with ways to manage their mental wellness.”

In addition to securing historic investments to support the mental health of every Pennsylvania, Governor Shapiro [signed an Executive Order](#) establishing [the Commonwealth's Behavioral Health Council](#) in October 2023 to bring together state and local community leaders and providers to develop an action plan to address mental health and addiction services. Dr. Christina Finello, Executive Director of the Behavioral Health Council, joined the Governor and students today for the roundtable discussion.

“The Shapiro Administration is making the health and wellness of every Pennsylvanian a priority – and has made significant historic investments in mental health funding for schools while increasing community based mental health funding in our counties,” **said Dr. Christina Finello, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Behavioral Health Council**. “Governor Shapiro wants to continue to make these important investments to create a resilient behavioral health system, improving the lives of those with mental health and or substance use disorder needs. We want people to be able to get the care that they need when they need it. The Behavioral Health Council aims to reduce the burden of mental health and substance use disorders on our communities across Pennsylvania, to help our youth, our families, our friends, and neighbors here in Pennsylvania get the help that they need when they are in need.”

For more information on mental health services available to all Pennsylvanians, click [here](#).

For more information on the Governor’s proposed budget, visit [shapirobudget.pa.gov](#).

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