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## CHAIRMAN'S LETTER



The aftermath of COVID has laid bare the racial, social and health inequities throughout the world. It has lifted the lid on discrimination, health disparities, lack of access to quality healthcare, and the ever-present polarization of our citizenry. We have been forced to reevaluate our health care system and its' history of racial and social injustices. We have had to confront what we have always known in terms of our lack of progress in addressing the healthcare challenges of the poor, Indigenous and people of color. Nevertheless, what we have not completely come to grips with is how COVID has unmasked the myriad of difficulties our children are facing. Prior to COVID, our youth were experiencing an increase in social disconnectedness and

mental health disorders and for those in the lower socioeconomic class, a widening of the academic achievement gap. Add to these issues the loss of loved ones, the fear of further loss, diminished family support, increased abuse and neglect, and enhanced isolation and we find our youth at a crisis point as a result of COVID.

How do we address these challenges? It begins by acknowledging the depth and breadth of this crisis and creating a system of care commensurate with the scope of the problem. Analyzing objective data and acquiring a better understanding of these issues from the youth's perspective are critical steps in creating an effective solution. The data has been building over the past several years only to be placed under a microscope since the onset of the COVID pandemic. We have seen a rise in essentially every category that adversely affects the health and well-being of children over the past 3 years. However, I do not believe we fully understand the why. The why has been captured in part by data and statistics but it has not been captured through the voices of our youth.

School-based health centers (SBHCs) have always offered a safe place for youth to vocalize their feelings, attitudes, and perspectives, especially in the area of mental health. Studies have revealed that youth access mental and behavioral health services at a significantly higher rate when these services are offered at a SBHC versus a community based mental health system.<sup>1</sup> Studies have also proven that for those students who receive mental health services at SBHCs, there is an increase in school connectedness and graduation rates.<sup>2</sup> Finally, students who have access to a SBHC have increased preventative services when compared to those who cannot access a SBHC.<sup>3</sup> SBHCs are vital to fully defining the problems of our youth and essential in creating the support that offers a solution.

#### References:

1. Juszczak, L., Melinkovich, P., & Kaplan, D. (2003). Use of health and mental health services by adolescents across multiple delivery sites. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 32*(Suppl6), 108–118. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1054-139X\(03\)00073-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1054-139X(03)00073-9)
2. Strolin-Goltzman J, Sisselman A, Melekis K, Auerbach C. Understanding the relationship between school-based health center use, school connection, and academic performance. *Health Soc Work. 2014;39:83-91.* doi: 10.1093/hsw/hlu018
3. Adams K, Strahan A, Joski, P, Hawley J, Johnson V, Hogue C. Effect of Elementary School-Based Health Centers in Georgia on Use of Preventive Services. *AJPM. 2020;59(4):p 504-512*

# GASBHA OVERVIEW

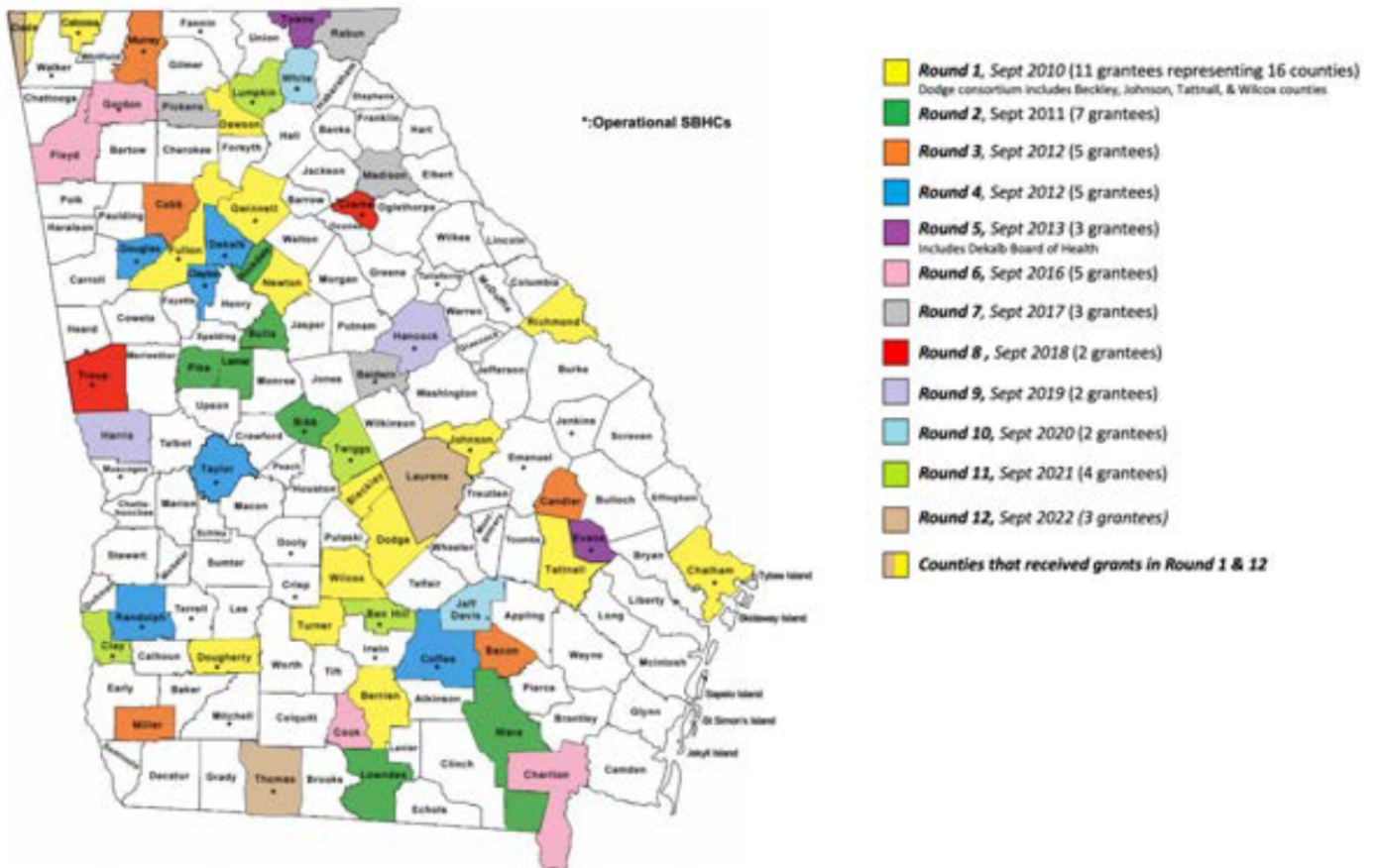
## OBJECTIVES

- Increase access to healthcare for the uninsured, Medicaid, and CHIP eligible children and adolescents
- Improve health outcomes for under-resourced children and adolescents
- Improve academic achievement through reduced absenteeism

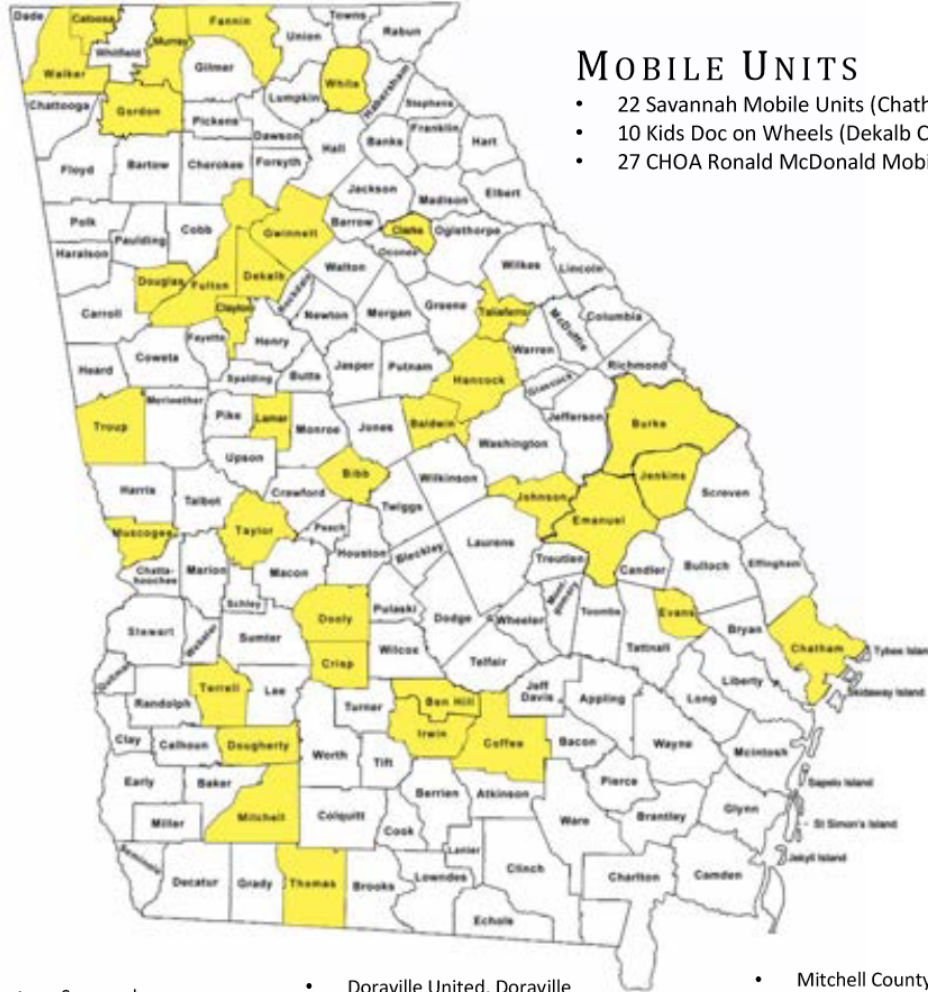
## MISSION

GASBHA advances the health and success of Georgia's children through community partnerships to develop and support SBHCs

## PLANNING GRANTEEES MAP



# OPERATIONAL SBHCs



## MOBILE UNITS

- 22 Savannah Mobile Units (Chatham County)
- 10 Kids Doc on Wheels (DeKalb County)
- 27 CHOA Ronald McDonald Mobile Units (Fulton County)

- AB Williams Elementary, Savannah
- Albany Middle (Dental), Albany
- Alice Coachman Elementary, Albany
- Baldwin County Early Learning Center, Milledgeville
- Ben Hill Middle School, Fitzgerald
- Bloomingdale Elementary, Savannah
- Brock Elementary, Savannah
- Burnett/Eastside Elementary, Douglasville
- Calloway Elementary, La Grange
- Chatsworth Elementary, Chatsworth
- Claxton Elementary School, Claxton
- Coffee Middle, Douglas
- College Park Elementary, College Park
- Cooper-Carver Elementary, Dawson
- Crisp County Elementary, Cordele
- Dobbs Elementary, Atlanta
- Dooly County Elementary, Pinehurst
- Doraville United, Doraville
- Doraville United, Doraville
- Dorothy Height Elementary School, Columbus
- Fairmount Elementary, Fairmount
- Fox Elementary, Columbus
- Gilbert Elementary, LaFayette
- Hancock Central High School, Sparta
- Hilsman Middle School, Athens
- Hollis Innovation Academy, Atlanta
- Ingram-Pye Elementary, Macon
- Irwin County Middle and High Schools, Irwin
- Jenkins County Elementary, Millen
- Johnson Elementary, Wrightsville
- KIPP Vision, Atlanta
- Lake Forest Elementary, Sandy Springs
- Lamar County Primary School, Barnesville
- Live Oak Elementary, Albany
- L.P. Miles Elementary, Atlanta
- Martin Luther King Middle, Atlanta
- Mitchell County Elementary, Bancanton
- North Clayton High, College Park
- Randolph County High School, Cuthbert
- Ringgold High School, Ringgold
- Robert Harvey Elementary, Albany
- Roseville Elementary, Rossville
- Rossville Middle, Rossville
- Taliaferro County K-12, Crawfordville
- Taylor County Primary, Butler
- Taylor County Upper Elementary, Butler
- Thomas County Middle School, Thomasville
- Tiger Creek Elementary, Tunnel Hill
- Toomer Elementary, Atlanta
- Turner Elementary (Dental)
- Twin City Elementary, Twin City
- Waynesboro Primary School
- Westside Elementary, Rossville
- White County High School, Cleveland
- Whiteford Elementary, Atlanta

# THE ROLE OF SBHCs IN THE AFTERMATH OF COVID

*FQHC Interview – Clifton Bush  
Chief Operating Officer of Albany Area Primary Care*

## How has the role of SBHCs been impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic?



The pandemic interrupted key programs like the pediatric summer behavioral health program. Yet, despite some losses, SBHCs have also been able to provide vaccines and COVID tests to students, staff, and parents. SBHCs also participated in district level COVID task forces. These new partnerships have strengthened collaborations and will hopefully be continued.

## What have been the most common concerns or illnesses amongst students at SBHCs?

Mental health continues to be a major concern, and our supply of mental and behavioral health providers at SBHCs does not meet the demand for counseling and testing. Also, it has been an ongoing process to get students back into routine clinical care. From dental care to well child checks -- many students missed out during the pandemic. We are still trying to update contact information and get families reacclimated.

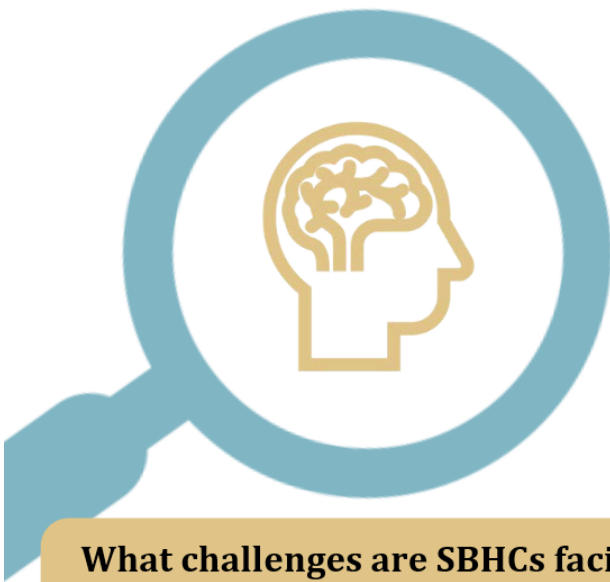


## What strategies have been used to address these new issues in the aftermath of COVID?



We've hired a patient navigator to help with locating students and bringing them back into clinic. With mental health support, schools are getting creative with provider coverage. For example, a school proposed having split coverage with a Nurse Practitioner and a Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist. Lastly, we are continuing to make health care accessible through our mobile units and by bussing students to their nearest SBHC as needed.

# A CLOSER LOOK AT MENTAL HEALTH



Mental health continues to be a major concern for children and adolescents across the state. Our youth are still recovering from emotional, mental, financial, and physical hardships experienced during the pandemic. These can manifest as increased sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, anger, and even violence. **Mrs. Rutubula Pettaway LCSW**, a licensed clinical social worker of Southside Medical Center, provides insight on this topic:

## What challenges are SBHCs facing in being able to respond to students' mental health needs?

SBHCs are challenged with educating parents on how to best support their child. Parents play a big role in helping students maintain progress and practice coping skills.

There are also many students dealing with grief and loss from COVID, but also due to gun violence in their communities. The number of students and the nature of their stressors requires more mental and behavioral health providers working in SBHCs.

## How can SBHCs better support students in this persisting mental health crisis?

SBHCs should ensure that students are assessed, appropriately diagnosed, and referred when needed. They should also prioritize parent engagement. Parents need to know that some of their child's behaviors may be related to their mental health.

Sometimes students and families may need special support. SBHCs should remind families of the Georgia Crisis & Access Line for crisis intervention, parent guidance, and United Way (211) for community resources.

# RECAP OF THE 2022 GASBHA CONFERENCE

The annual GASBHA conference returned to an in person format this year with education and health care leaders from all over the state in attendance! From Dr. Sheryl Heron's keynote presentation to breakout sessions and informal networking, the conversation was all about advancing health equity in school-based health centers.

Congratulations to **The Zeist Foundation** for receiving the inaugural *Georgia's Champion in School Based Health Award*. The Zeist Foundation embraces a holistic approach to address the needs of underserved children in the areas of Human Services, Education and Arts & Culture.







~ **The Zeist Foundation, 2022 Champions in School Based Health** ~

# REFLECTIONS FROM A VICIOUS SICK SEASON:

## What is a “Tridemic”?

At the end of 2022, children were affected by what has been called the “Tridemic” -- a viral triple threat of COVID-19, influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). It can be challenging to tell the illnesses apart but there are some key differences that can help.

How To Tell Them Apart					
Common symptoms of all four illnesses include fever, cough, fatigue, stuffy, runny nose and congestion. Some symptoms that may be different include:					
Illness	Sudden loss of taste or smell	Headache	Loss of appetite	Sore throat	Sneezing
 COVID-19	✓	✓	✓	✓	
 Flu		✓	✓	✓	✓
 Cold				✓	✓
 Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)					✓



Typically, viruses have their own specific seasons, but this past season, these viruses appeared early and struck all at once. This caused children to miss school days as they recovered at home or in hospitals. Fortunately, the surge is on a decline. However, there are ways SBHCs can prepare students and families for future sick seasons.

## Tips to Prevent Illness

1. Children should practice proper hand washing and use hand sanitizer regularly.
2. Practice proper coughing/sneezing techniques.
3. Children should stay home if they develop a fever.
4. Though there is no general vaccine for RSV yet, students and staff can receive an annual vaccine for the flu and COVID vaccines/boosters as recommended.



# ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW!

Understanding absenteeism and tips to improve attendance

**Chronic school absenteeism** (missing 15+ days of school), as early as Pre-K & kindergarten, puts students at risk for:

- Poor school performance and school dropout
- Unhealthy behaviors as teenagers and young adults



**Poor health** is one of the main causes of chronic absenteeism. Common chronic health concerns include:

- Asthma/Allergies
- Diabetes
- Sickle Cell

## Tips to Improve Attendance

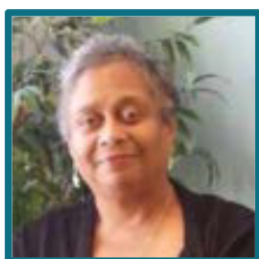
- Students should seek medical care as soon as possible
- If a student has no fever, serious cough, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea, they can return to school!
- Students shouldn't stay home just because others are sick





# UPDATE FROM GEORGIA'S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (GaDOE)

*Interview with Ruth Ellis, Program Specialist of School-Based Health Care*



## **What's the exciting news from the DOE?**

In August of 2022, Governor Kemp announced he would dedicate \$125 million with the goal of opening over 100 new school-based health centers. The funding will be administered by the Georgia Department of Education through a grant program run by GASBHA. The grants will be offered in rounds and funds must be used by the end of 2026.

## **What changes came with this new investment?**



With this new investment, the typical \$10,000 for the planning year remains the same. However, schools will receive \$308,000 for space renovation (increased from \$50,000) and \$682,000 over a two-year period to the medical sponsor (increased from \$226,000). Also, the planning grant applications must come from the school district. For the first-round with the new investment, eligible schools include CSI, CSI-Promise and TSI schools. For the second-round with the new investment, eligible schools include CSI, TSI, Promise, or any rural school.



## **How can my school become a grantee?**

The Georgia Department of Education will be accepting planning grant applications this fall. The anticipated release of the Request for Applications is November 1, 2023. Please visit the GaDOE SBHC webpage for updates.



## **What resources are available to help in the process?**

People can use the many resources on the [School Based Health Center page](#) on the GaDOE website for support. GaDOE will also be having a few more topic specific seminars to help superintendents as they complete their proposals.

**For more information, contact Ruth at [ruth.ellis@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:ruth.ellis@doe.k12.ga.us)**

# SBHCs MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

*We want to shout out all our wonderful SBHCs for the amazing work they're doing.*



One Sight Vision Center – Alice Coachman School-Based Health



Miles Elementary School-Based Health Center



Tiger Creek Elementary School-Based Health Center



North Clayton High School-Based Health Center



Whitefoord Elementary School-Based Health Center  
*First Comprehensive SBHC (January 1995)*



Chatsworth Elementary School-Based Health Center



Hilsman Middle School-Based Health Center



Community Healthcare Systems — School-Based Health Center



Bee Well Clinic



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

*We are excited to announce the opening of two new School-Based Health Centers – Hancock & Ben Hill!*

## Hancock Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



## Ben Hill Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

