

## **Response to 2023-24 DAC Recommendations**

### ***Mental Health/Behavior Recommendation #1***

The DAC recommends that the superintendent:

- **By August 2024 - Initiate a task force with a representative set of stakeholders (to include the student services team) to gather community input around common life management/resiliency challenges for middle and high school students**
- **By December 2024 - Initiate a feasibility study of implementing a pilot program of life management/resiliency skills in middle school curriculum/ classrooms**

Based on the results of the feasibility study:

- **If feasible, secure funding and implement a pilot program in the 2025-26 school the following school year in 1-2 schools**
- **If not feasible - share barriers that exist or other recommendations or ideas**

### ***Response:***

The state has already established resiliency standards for secondary students. During the 2023-24 school year, those were shared through the Habitudes online curriculum and supported by our Student Services team. The state standards that focus on resilience and reflect specified character traits will continue to be outlined in that manner for schools during the 2024-25 school year. Additionally, our staff will provide monthly character skills which our elementary schools will focus on throughout the year.

Again, these skills are already being taught as part of our state-required five-hour mental health sessions for middle school students. The resiliency standards and focus are already outlined.

Topics suggested will be considered with others that have been provided by community members through the annual Title 1 Meeting and feedback provided by parents who have attended the district's weekly Parent Academy webinars. This year virtual offerings related to mental health topics will be shared by ParentGuidance.org. Parents can also go to that site to find archived mental health topics and on-demand courses for free. These offerings are in addition to the free parent coaching available through ParentGuidance.org (flier attached).

## ***Mental Health/Behavior Recommendation #2***

**The DAC recommends staffing a Behavior Resource Teacher for every 500 students in all middle and high schools for the 2024-25 school year. If this cannot be implemented, the district would provide information to the DAC on why it is not feasible.**

### ***Response:***

Currently the ACPS School Board-approved staffing manual assigns units for behavioral resource teachers based on the number of students enrolled at a school. BRTs are typically referred to as deans in middle and high schools, although the job descriptions are the same and all employees filling that role are coded as BRTs regardless of grade level. (See attached job description.)

That formula is as follows:

<b><u>Middle Schools</u></b>	<b><u># of BRTs</u></b>
Fewer than 700 students	1
700+ students	2
<b><u>High Schools</u></b>	
Fewer than 1200 students	2
1200-1700 students	3
1700+ students	4
<b><u>Combination Schools/Special Centers</u></b>	
Hawthorne Middle/High School	1
High Springs Community School	2
PAM@Loften	1
A Quinn Jones School	2
Sidney Lanier School	1

**It's important to note that some schools already have an additional dean unit beyond what is allocated through the staffing manual based on the needs of the students and school, which is funded by converting units for other positions to a dean position or by using an alternative source of funding. This includes Kanapaha Middle, (1011 students) with 3 deans; Lincoln Middle, (614 students) with 2 deans; Ft. Clarke Middle, (832 students) with 3 deans; Bishop Middle, (823 students) with 3 deans; Westwood Middle (853 students) with 3 deans; and Hawthorne Middle High (374 students) with 2 deans.**

While the DAC's recommended formula is one BRT for every 500 students, the DAC did not specify whether the proposed formula would require a full or partial unit for any number of students over a multiple of 500. This is important, because of course student populations rarely come in multiples of 500.

If the DAC is proposing the staffing of one BRT/500 students at the non-center schools in addition to the current allocation and assuming an additional unit for any number over a multiple of 500, this would require an additional 32 BRTs to be hired across the district at an added cost of \$2,448,962.88. This is based on the average salary/benefits for secondary BRTs of \$76,530.09

Currently the district is facing significant budget challenges, including:

- **The end of ESSER funding:** The \$95+ million allocation the district received from the federal government to help students and schools recover from the pandemic runs out September 30, 2024.
- **The statewide expansion of private school vouchers, charter schools and other alternative schools:** Every student who leaves a traditional school for one of these options means a loss of about \$8000 in funding. There is, however, no real reduction in expenses as a result of the student leaving a traditional public school.
- **Higher costs:** The cost of operating the district continues to increase, with higher costs for fuel, school supplies and equipment, insurance, state-mandated contributions to the Florida Retirement System, maintenance, etc.

The district is also facing a significant staffing challenge. As of September 3, there were 49 instructional vacancies in the district, including 22 instructional student support services vacancies for positions including counselors, social workers and psychologists. It is highly unlikely the district would be able to find enough qualified applicants to fill those positions, and certainly not without removing teachers from the classroom, which is typically where BRTs/deans come from.

For both financial reasons and in light of the ongoing (and nationwide) teacher shortage, the addition of BRTs at middle and high schools is currently not feasible.

### ***Transportation Suggestion #1***

**Send out a survey to get input from stakeholders (educators and parents) who have been impacted by the reduction in courtesy busing (defined as transportation for students living within two miles of their school who are not eligible for transportation under state law), with results presented to the district administration and School Board.**

### ***Response:***

In January of 2024 and in response to the significant and unfunded costs of courtesy busing, the district eliminated courtesy busing for all but our seven school improvement (SI) schools. This has resulted in a cost savings of about \$1.8 million.

The district is maintaining courtesy busing for all the schools on SI status in 2023-24, even those that have now been removed from the list based on their 2024 school grades. The district is also regularly reviewing requests for busing from families based on their students potentially facing hazardous walking conditions.

It is likely and completely understandable that most parents, if asked if they would like to have busing for their children, would likely say ‘yes.’ The issue is whether it’s feasible for the district under the current financial climate to provide courtesy busing, which most if not all other districts in Florida do not offer because *none* of the costs are reimbursed by the state.

It’s important to note that the state currently reimburses only about half the cost of busing for students it *requires* districts to transport. The rest must be borne by the district’s general fund. The cost of running one bus per year is \$108,000.

## ***Transportation Suggestion #2***

**Formally contact Alachua County Government to request that the 45 mph speed limit in front of Terwilliger Elementary be extended on Parker Road south of Terwilliger Elementary School.**

### ***Response:***

The Public Information Office reached out to Alachua County Government regarding this request, and was directed to Thomas Strom, Transportation Engineering Manager with the Public Works Department. Below is his response.

**Thank you bringing this request to the County's attention. The County has received similar requests and recently reviewed the speed zone in Spring 2024. The Florida Department of Transportation's Speed Zoning Manual has established the engineering procedures by which speed zones are to be measured and established in the State of Florida. The Manual requires a traffic study, and that the posted speed limit to be rounded to the nearest multiple of 5 MPH of the observed 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed or upper limit of the 10 MPH pace, whichever is less. These procedures for establishing speed zones have been adopted by State Statute. A spot speed study was conducted in the Fall of 2023 and the data collected determined that the current posted speed limit is consistent with these requirements. Alachua County Public Works will continue to monitor the location to determine if conditions change to warrant further study.**

**If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.**

## ***Mental Health Suggestion***

**Address the issue of replacing behavior-related staff currently funded through ESSER.**

### ***Response:***

The district currently employs two TSAs (Teachers on Special Assignment) who focus on providing behavioral support for schools. These positions will be funded through ESSER through September 30, when all ESSER funding ends. The district plans to find alternative sources of funding to keep these staff members in place at least through the end of the 2024-25 school year.

A state Resilience grant facilitated by The Education Foundation provided funding for 11 behavioral paraprofessionals who supported schools identified by discipline data; they included some schools with calm rooms and the Braintree program throughout the district during the 2023-24 school year. (Information was shared previously with the DAC by the Student Services team about the calm rooms and the Braintree program, which is a neuroscience-based wellness program.) However, those funds were temporary, and the positions are no longer being funded. The Braintree program remains in Metcalfe, Rawlings, Howard Bishop, Shell, and Hawthorne but without targeted behavior paras to assist. Archer, Ft. Clarke and Santa Fe High School also have dedicated space for calm rooms.

As indicated in response to Mental Health Recommendation 2, the district is facing significant fiscal challenges, which means transferring the cost of these positions to the general fund would not be feasible.

However, the district has focused on professional learning opportunities to build capacity among other employees with behavior-focused training and other essential roles, such as social workers through other grant funding sources, including: BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analysts) support, RBT (Registered Behavior Therapy) Support, Beyond the Bell (after hours virtual school counseling services), Reframing Behavior Training by CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute) for deans/BRTs, Conscious

Discipline Training, Gator Connect (school psychologists, school counselors and social workers at specified schools) and district professional learning for topics such as classroom management, verbal de-escalation, and Tier 1 Practices.

The district has implemented the Before the Bell program, which offers counseling and mental health services before school. This is provided through the Stronger Connections Grant.

The Beyond the Bell program (after school virtual counseling services) referred to earlier launches September 23 (flier attached.)

The district is also continuing its partnership with Hazel Health, which provides virtual mental health counseling for students both at home and at school. (A flier is attached.)

The Student Services Department is scheduling virtual training sessions during the month of September, all focused on behavior and mental health. Almost all training sessions will be held after school and stipends will be provided for employees to attend. This training is being funded through ESSER.

### *Sports Suggestion*

#### **Investigate expanding the middle school sports program to include running/track-related sports.**

This suggestion was discussed with the staff member who directly oversees athletics in the district. Among the issues he cited:

- Lack of a track at three of the seven middle schools in the district (Westwood, Ft. Clarke and Mebane)
- Difficulty in securing coaches (most of the coaches of middle school sports are teachers)
- Need to add another supplement to the salary schedule
- Difficulty in finding officials for high school track activities

### *Suggestions for DAC By-Law Changes*

**DAC members discussed by-law changes that should be considered by the 2024-25 DAC, including: allowing substitutes for school-based and board member-selected DAC members to vote and have their votes count toward a quorum, and; clarifying the process for presenting DAC recommendations to the Superintendent/School Board.**

### *Response:*

These suggestions will be brought to the 2024-25 DAC for discussion and vote.

**The following suggestion was approved by a majority of the members present, although a quorum was not in place.**

**SUGGESTION: Provide additional information about the DAC to SACs/PTAs/PTO; encourage SAC chairs, preferably at every SAC meeting, to solicit input from their members for possible discussion/consideration by the DAC; provide all SAC chairs with DAC agendas/minutes**

### *Response:*

Because these suggestions do not involve a change in bylaws, they do not require a DAC vote, and will therefore be implemented for the 2024-25 school year.

## Supplementary materials

### ParentGuidance.org Parent Coaching



### How does Coaching work and how can I participate?

Your school district has purchased individual coaching as a tool for parents, which makes coaching FREE to parents.



*Are you getting more guidance on how to help your child with their school work?*

*Parents who work with their coaches can get more help with their children.*

Coaches are like your virtual parenting assistant, working together to help you help your child. Our coaches are trained, specialized, certified and ready to help!



#### Step-by-Step Guide: Register for Coaching

- 1 To see if coaching is a good fit, register here: <https://CookCenter.info/GetCoaching>
- 2 Select 'begin' & complete the confidential questionnaire (About 5 min)
- 3 Receive a response within 24 hours from a certified ParentGuidance.org coach
- 4 Get a personalized plan in your first meeting
- 5 Meet with your coach once a week
- 6 Have a difficult moment, message your coach 24/7 and receive responses within 24 hours.

**Your participation in Parent Coaching is NEVER reported to the district!**

### Beyond the Bell

# BEYOND THE BELL

## Virtual After-School Counseling and Academic Advising

Exciting news, students and parents! Starting on September 23rd, Alachua County Public Schools is continuing an innovative program aimed at boosting your academic achievements and emotional wellness.



#### KEY PROGRAM FEATURES:

**Virtual After-School Counseling**

- Talk to a certified school counselor.
- Obtain guidance on homework, study skills, and organization.
- Discuss academic challenges, social issues, and concerns.

**Academic Advising & Career Planning**

- Course and schedule assistance.
- College and career readiness advice.
- Skills assessments to identify areas of strength and interest.

**Emotional Wellness**

- Learn effective techniques to manage stress.
- Build resilience by developing skills to handle setbacks, build self-esteem, and promote overall well-being.

griffints1@gm.sbac.edu 352-955-7676

Alachua County Public Schools WWW.SBAC.EDU/BEYONDTHEBELL



### Hazel Health




## Connect your child or teen to virtual mental health support

With Hazel Health, your child can get the mental health support they need, **at no cost to you.**

**Virtual sessions with licensed therapists**

- 1 **Sign up**  
Give permission for your child or teen to see a Hazel therapist
- 2 **Therapy referral**  
Either you or a school staff member refers your child to therapy by contacting Hazel
- 3 **First therapy session**  
Hazel matches your child with a therapist and schedules an appointment
- 4 **Weekly therapy sessions**  
Over video, the therapist helps your child cope with what they're feeling
- 5 **Therapy completion**  
Your child has achieved their therapy goals and is discharged from the therapy program
- 6 **Care coordination**  
If needed, Hazel helps connect your family with long-term mental health services in your community

**During weekly therapy sessions, Hazel Health therapists help students understand and cope with what they're feeling**

Anxiety Depression  
Grief/loss Self-esteem  
Change Academic stress  
Bullying and more

Learn more and consent for services [hazel.co/alachua](https://hazel.co/alachua)  
Request a therapy appointment for your child by calling Hazel Health at 1-800-76-HAZEL (42935). Services differ by district and school. To see what services your district offers, visit [hazel.co/alachua](https://hazel.co/alachua).

