



# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Vaya Health, community partners receive grant to improve school safety**

*Program aims to enhance student mental health, decrease risk of suicide and other violence*

ASHEVILLE, N.C – A new state grant aims to increase safety at Asheville City and Buncombe County schools and connect students with mental health or substance use concerns to appropriate treatment.

The North Carolina School Safety Grants Program has awarded \$63,000 to Vaya Health, a public managed healthcare organization, to partner with the two school systems and community organizations during the 2018-19 school year. The grant will be used to provide students with timelier and improved behavioral health services and to train school staff and treatment providers to more effectively help students who are in crisis or at risk of mental health or substance use issues.

“Nationally, between 13 to 20 percent of adolescents are diagnosed with a mental health disorder,” said Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham. “However, due to limited funding, current services at the two school systems reach only 3 percent of students. This grant will link more students with treatment and create an environment that facilitates both learning and improved mental health.”

Over the past two years, both Asheville City and Buncombe County schools have seen increases in threats and crisis-related episodes. As the academic year progresses, increased numbers of young people are admitted to inpatient psychiatric hospitals.

“Buncombe County Schools is committed to making our schools the safest and most supportive learning environments possible,” said David Thompson, BCS director of student services. “This can only be done through community partnerships that focus on violence and suicide prevention, restorative practices and a culture of support that is sensitive to the trauma and chronic stress that students, staff and parents experience. This grant is a great example of using our collective strengths to increase the social and emotional well-being of our students and our community.”

“Asheville City Schools is committed to the overall wellbeing of our students,” said Eric Howard, ACS director of student services. “The joint safety grant opportunity will help our district with much-needed training and awareness to better serve our students and create a safer school environment.”

Grant funds will be used to enhance screenings for student safety and risk of violence, including suicide, as well as referrals to local behavioral health providers for assessment and appropriate treatment. Other activities include respite for students at behavioral health centers and training for Therapeutic Foster Care families and child-placing agencies to provide successful treatment in foster care settings.

The grant will also fund a variety of evidence-based trainings for school staff. These include:

- Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM), a suicide prevention program
- Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA), a program to help young people who are in crisis or developing a mental health or substance use problem
- Community Resiliency Model (CRM), a program that teaches individuals to build resiliency and manage anxiety in healthier ways
- Restorative Practices (RP), a program to improve students' relationships and built trust with peers and school staff

In addition to Vaya and the two school systems, 10 providers, agencies and community organizations will support grant activities: A Caring Alternative, LLC; Access Family Services; Buncombe County Health and Human Services; the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office; the Children's Collaborative of Buncombe County; Family Preservation Services of NC; Mission Health System; Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC).; the N.C. Department of Public Safety, Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice; and RHA Health Services.

### **About Vaya Health**

Based in Asheville, N.C., Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 23 western North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to care and crisis assistance are available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at [www.vayahealth.com](http://www.vayahealth.com).

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