



## **Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools: Expanding Access to Services and Supports**

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS) is working to address a problem most North Carolina school districts are facing, post-COVID: More kids are struggling with their mental health. Elementary school kids have less well-developed socio-emotional skills and are entering school with higher levels of anxiety. Increased instances of fighting and substance use have been noted among high schoolers. Parents are struggling to help their kids manage their mental health challenges.

Adding to the challenge, behavioral health providers are struggling to meet the growing demand from kids and families, especially those who need more complex care. Residential facility space, in particular, is difficult to find. Kids are often moved from facility to facility or have to stay at home as they wait for a placement to become available. While kids are shuffled through this system, they often don't receive any schooling. When they return to school, they are behind and, in many cases, drop out.

WS/FCS's strong behavioral health resource leadership and its supportive community of partners are focused on addressing these growing challenges.

### **WS/FCS Action Plan**

i2i facilitated a 90-minute discussion with the WS/FCS team and its community partners to develop an action plan to expand access to services and supports for kids and families:

- 1. Coordinate with local networks.** Forsyth County's mental health support organizations meet regularly as members of the county's System of Care (SOC) Collaborative to discuss the community's needs, share best practices, and identify resources and providers with the capacity to serve more people. The SOC can help ensure WS/FCS is using every community resource to help kids and families, especially those managing more complex needs.
- 2. Connect families to partners.** Family Partners are local residents who have successfully guided their children through the process of accessing mental healthcare. Youth Partners are kids who have received care and worked through recovery. These peers can navigate available care resources and are better able to build connections with families and kids who need services.
- 3. Add a prevention focus.** Helping kids and families with immediate needs is a priority. But solving the growing youth mental health crisis, and creating more provider availability, requires being able to identify mental health issues before they become problems. WS/FCS can work with local organizations like NC Youth and Family Voices Amplified and Partners Health Management that produce and distribute prevention content for teachers, parents, and kids.
- 4. Build awareness of additional benefits.** Health plans serving Medicaid beneficiaries offer additional benefits that provide access to therapy and can help cover the costs of mental healthcare or support. WS/FCS can work with these plans to raise awareness of these benefits among school personnel and families.

### **Convening Participants**

Thank you to all of the Winston-Salem and Forsyth County behavioral health leaders who joined i2i and the WS/FCS team for our convening:

- [Forsyth County Department of Public Health](#)
- [Mental Health Association in Forsyth County](#)
- [Mental Health Transformation Alliance](#)
- [NC DHHS, Division of Child and Family Well-Being](#)
- [NC Psychiatry Access Line](#)
- [NC Youth and Family Voices Amplified](#)
- [Partners Health Management](#)
- [United Healthcare](#)
- [WellCare of North Carolina](#)