

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Howard County School-Based Wellness Centers Expand Health Services for Students

### Congressman John Sarbanes Receives National Congressional School-Based Health Care Champion Award

**Columbia, MD** – Today, the Howard County Health Department announced the expansion of services at School-Based Wellness Centers located in 11 Howard County Public Schools, as a result of \$815,000 in additional funding from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). This funding will provide students with comprehensive preventative health care and chronic disease management that includes annual physicals, behavioral health screenings and health education. Chronic diseases such as ADHD, asthma and obesity will be managed at the Centers in coordination with the student, parent and the student’s primary health care provider. “This critical MDH funding allows us to expand services that support our students’ health and academic goals. Healthy students get better grades, have better attendance, and focus better in class” says Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura J. Rossman. (Photos from the event may be found [here](#). Video of the event are [here](#).)

There are 11 School-Based Wellness Centers housed in elementary, middle and high schools across the County. Over 3,000 children are currently enrolled in the Centers with more enrolling daily. Providing children the opportunity to receive acute and chronic disease management while in the school setting, reduces absenteeism for students and for the parents who would lose time from work going to an appointment, or caring for a sick child. “In Howard County public schools, it is our mission to ensure that every student has the resources and tools to achieve success, academically and otherwise. Comprehensive healthcare to students through school-based wellness centers is an incredibly valuable service that we can offer our families,” said Howard County Public School System Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Martirano. “We are grateful for our collaboration with the Howard County Health Department to advance and grow this initiative, and the Maryland Department of Health for providing critical funding to realize this wonderful expansion.”

Children are able to see a provider onsite or via a telemedicine visit using specialized instruments that allow a pediatrician (and parent) to see inside the child’s ears, nose and throat to easily diagnose an illness. Dr. R. Scott Strahlman, a pediatrician at the Columbia Medical Practice, who led today’s telemedicine demonstration says, ““School-based telemedicine visits are in many ways better than office visits, because of the technology involved, and because the student does not miss school.”.

“We know that the pandemic underscored several needs specifically around the well-being of our children and uncovered many barriers for sick children and their families,” said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. “In this year’s school budget, we added seven health assistants, two nurses,



# Media Release

Page two

## **Howard County School-Based Wellness Centers Expand Health Services for Students**

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and one health specialist who will be integral into the expansion. We want to be able to treat illness and prevent chronic disease, asthma, and obesity so kids can stay in school. By investing in our children's health, we can change the trajectory of their lives—so they can stay active and engaged in school, work, and play.”

The benefits of school-based health have been recognized for a number of years at the local, state and national levels. Organizations such as the non-profit School-Based Health Alliance have worked to set the national policy and legislative agenda, while advocating for greater support and funding. This year, they presented their Congressional School-Based Health Care Champion Award at the wellness center expansion announcement. The recipient of the award was Congressman John Sarbanes (MD-D 3<sup>rd</sup> Dist) for his support of school-based health care as the Vice Chair of the House Subcommittee on Health. “There is no greater Congressional champion for school-based health centers than John Sarbanes. Thanks to his consistent advocacy and leadership over the years, Congress appropriated funding for the first time ever in Fiscal Year 2021 to expand and support school-based health centers. Thank you, Congressman Sarbanes.”

“Expanding our School-Based Health Centers across Howard County Public Schools will ensure that more students have access to high-quality, comprehensive primary, mental and behavioral health care and other services right in their own schools,” said Congressman Sarbanes. “Through my work in Congress, I have helped secure robust federal funding to bolster SBHCs in Maryland and across the country, supporting students’ health and improving their academic outcomes. It is a great honor to receive the Congressional School-Based Health Care Champion Award in recognition of my efforts, and I will continue advocating for SBHCs to meet our students’ health needs.”

For more information about Howard County Health Department’s School-Based Wellness Centers, visit our website at [www.howardcountymd.gov/health/school-based-wellness-centers](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/health/school-based-wellness-centers).

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