



Westchester Children's Association (WCA) is a 107-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. Campaign for Kids is our coalition of 100+ organizations and individuals concerned with increasing opportunities and supports for young people in our County.

**Our recommendations this year place children's mental, social, and emotional health and wellbeing front and center.** Recognizing that children, youth, and families have access to different resources, both during this time of the pandemic and long before it, we aim to promote equity throughout Westchester County.

We offer the following recommendations for the 2022 Operating Budget:

#### **Children's Mental Health**

- **Dedicate NEW \$100,000 tax-levy funding to expand mental health supports for school age children**
  - **Integrate service planning** with DCMH, Youth Bureau, DSS, schools and community stakeholders that would identify the needs and gaps in social and emotional supports for school age children and recommend programs to complement existing services.
  - **Allocate NEW funding through County Youth Bureau for mental health providers team/consultant/curriculum** with bilingual capacity for Invest in Kids funded agencies (including children and staff) for 2022 RFP cycle.

#### **Why is this important?**

With the third consecutive school year impacted by COVID-19 under way, students are facing unprecedented educational challenges and learning loss as well as the unparalleled stress and trauma of family and financial hardship. There is an urgent, unmet need to further develop a countywide effort on prevention and adaptive, innovative ways to support children's mental health needs. Cross team planning will better ensure a focused response to children's mental wellness. Now more than ever, Westchester must prioritize and advance children's mental health to ensure students are prepared to learn and grow this year and in the future.

#### **Invest in Kids:**

- **Maintain or expand existing funding for current Invest in Kids programs, totaling \$2,509,000.** This will allow the 57 current programs impacting thousands of Westchester youth to continue providing critical services.
- **Maintain \$50,000 in funding for Invest in Kids pilot programs, which achieve hyperlocal impact.**

#### **Why is this important?**

All Invest in Kids programs keep children and youth safe, support working families, and foster academic success. They fill a critical need in communities, especially now, by creating and strengthening connections for children during this time of rapid change and uncertainty. Including mental health support as part of Invest in Kids funded programs allows Westchester to meet this growing need while relying on existing County funding and contract arrangements through the County Youth Bureau.