

# 2026 HFI FUNDING REQUEST

## REQUESTING ORGANIZATION

NORTHEASTERN CENTER INC.

Address: 210 South Main Street Kendallville, IN 46755

Phone: 260-347-2453

## SIGNATORY

Steve Howell

## MISSION STATEMENT

Northeastern Center helps individuals achieve emotional and mental wholeness through accessible, affordable, quality behavioral health services

## PROJECT:

The Northeastern Center's School-Based Navigator program is designed to deliver measurable outcomes that demonstrate improved access to behavioral health services, earlier identification of mental health concerns, and enhanced student well-being. Over the course of the school year 2025-2026, at least 300 students will receive services including behavioral health navigation, screening, short-term intervention, or referral. Of those referred to external providers, 100% will receive follow-up and care coordination to support engagement and minimize service gaps. The program aims to ensure that 85% of students referred for support will complete an initial behavioral health screening or psychosocial assessment within ten school days. Among those screened, it is anticipated that at least 70% will be identified for early intervention or referral to more intensive services—indicating effective early detection of emerging behavioral health needs. Students receiving short-term, school-based interventions will be assessed for changes in functioning and symptom severity using validated clinical tools such as the PHQ-9, Likert scales for anxiety and depression, and GAD-7. It is expected that 60% of those students will show clinically significant improvement from baseline to discharge. Additionally, the program seeks to build mental health literacy and intervention capacity among school staff and families. A minimum of 75 school personnel will be trained in recognizing early signs of mental health concerns, implementing trauma-informed strategies, and supporting student well-being. At least 100 families will engage with School-Based Navigators for education, care coordination, and support in navigating behavioral health services. On a systems level, the program anticipates a 10% reduction in crisis-level behavioral incidents and emergency mental health referrals within participating schools, as a result of earlier support and preventive intervention. Post-program surveys of students and staff will measure changes in mental health awareness and stigma, with at least 80% of respondents reporting increased comfort in seeking help or referring others for behavioral health concerns. Additionally, the program is interested in evaluating the impact of behavioral health support on academic outcomes. In partnership with school personnel, NEC will examine changes in academic performance, including grade improvements, among students receiving services. This additional outcome will provide critical insight into the relationship between mental health and educational success, further reinforcing the value of integrating behavioral health supports directly into the school environment. These outcomes will be monitored through a

combination of service delivery data, assessment results, academic records (as permitted), training participation logs, and stakeholder feedback to ensure the program remains responsive to community needs and aligned with public health goals.

#### TARGET POPULATION:

The primary target population for NEC's school-based behavioral health navigation program is school-aged children and adolescents in DeKalb County, Indiana, with a focus on students enrolled in DeKalb Eastern, Garrett-Keyser-Butler, and DeKalb Central school districts. These students represent a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, with a significant portion facing challenges related to poverty, trauma, family instability, and limited access to mental health services. Many are either uninsured or underinsured, which historically limits their ability to receive timely behavioral health support. NEC's program also serves educators, school staff, and families—recognizing that a student's mental health is shaped by the support systems around them. By equipping these adults with the tools and knowledge to identify and respond to behavioral health needs, the program fosters a holistic, community-wide response to student well-being. In the upcoming year, NEC anticipates directly reaching and serving approximately 300 students through screenings, assessments, short-term counseling, or referrals to external providers. Additionally, educators and families will benefit from navigator-led consultations, trainings, and support as part of NEC's integrated approach to mental wellness. This comprehensive model ensures that the program not only addresses immediate behavioral health concerns but also strengthens the long-term capacity of schools and families to support youth mental health.

#### OUTCOMES:

The Northeastern Center's School-Based Navigator program is designed to deliver measurable outcomes that demonstrate improved access to behavioral health services, earlier identification of mental health concerns, and enhanced student well-being. Over the course of the school year 2025-2026, at least 300 students will receive services including behavioral health navigation, screening, short-term intervention, or referral. Of those referred to external providers, 100% will receive follow-up and care coordination to support engagement and minimize service gaps. The program aims to ensure that 85% of students referred for support will complete an initial behavioral health screening or psychosocial assessment within ten school days. Among those screened, it is anticipated that at least 70% will be identified for early intervention or referral to more intensive services—indicating effective early detection of emerging behavioral health needs. Students receiving short-term, school-based interventions will be assessed for changes in functioning and symptom severity using validated clinical tools such as the PHQ-9, Likert scales for anxiety and depression, and GAD-7. It is expected that 60% of those students will show clinically significant improvement from baseline to discharge. Additionally, the program seeks to build mental health literacy and intervention capacity among school staff and families. A minimum of 75 school personnel will be trained in recognizing early signs of mental health concerns, implementing trauma-informed strategies, and supporting student well-being. At least 100 families will engage with School-Based Navigators for education, care coordination, and support in navigating behavioral health services. On a systems level, the program anticipates a 10% reduction in crisis-level behavioral incidents and emergency mental health referrals within participating schools, as a result of earlier support and preventive intervention. Post-program surveys of students and staff will measure changes in mental health awareness and stigma, with at least 80% of respondents reporting increased comfort in seeking help or referring others for behavioral health concerns. Additionally, the program is interested in evaluating the impact of behavioral health support on academic outcomes. In partnership with school personnel, NEC will examine changes in academic performance, including grade improvements, among students receiving services. This additional outcome will provide critical insight into the relationship

between mental health and educational success, further reinforcing the value of integrating behavioral health supports directly into the school environment. These outcomes will be monitored through a combination of service delivery data, assessment results, academic records (as permitted), training participation logs, and stakeholder feedback to ensure the program remains responsive to community needs and aligned with public health goals.

#### HEALTH EQUITY STATEMENT:

The Northeastern Center’s School-Based Navigator program is a direct response to critical behavioral health gaps identified in the 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), developed in partnership with community stakeholders, including the Health First DeKalb Indiana. This program aligns with shared public health goals to expand early access to mental health care, reduce stigma, improve youth mental well-being, and address health disparities affecting underserved populations in DeKalb County. The program removes barriers to behavioral health services for underinsured, uninsured, and rural students by embedding professional School-Based Navigators directly into local school systems. This model addresses key CHNA-identified access challenges such as transportation limitations, lack of service coordination, stigma, and delayed engagement. By delivering services on-site at schools, students are not dependent on external appointments or transportation, ensuring timely care—particularly critical for families facing socioeconomic hardship or lacking reliable insurance coverage. School-Based Navigators work proactively with students, families, and educators to promote early identification of mental health needs, provide short-term support, and facilitate referrals to higher levels of care when appropriate. Importantly, this role supports navigation of complex insurance systems and connects families to available local resources—reducing care fragmentation and addressing social determinants of health, as prioritized in the CHNA. The program also strengthens the public health infrastructure by increasing mental health literacy among school staff and families, reducing stigma through education and normalization efforts, and building trauma-informed school environments. This coordinated, upstream approach reflects public health best practices and aligns with the Health First DeKalb Indiana’s commitment to population-level prevention, youth resiliency, and community-based behavioral health access. Northeastern Center is committed to tracking and reporting measurable health outcomes, including the number of students served, improvements in mental health symptoms, access to timely care, and—importantly—academic impact, as educational attainment is a core social determinant of health. This program represents an evidence-informed, equity-driven initiative that will advance behavioral health outcomes for DeKalb County’s most vulnerable children and adolescents, while complementing and strengthening the efforts of the Health First DeKalb Indiana.

#### BUDGET REQUEST:

\$50,000.00

#### BUDGET JUSTIFICATION:

The total cost to operate and sustain the Northeastern Center’s School-Based Navigator program for the 2025–2026 school year is \$240,000. This funding supports critical staffing, program delivery, and the continuum of behavioral health navigation services offered directly within DeKalb County schools. The program is currently staffed by two full-time providers; however, in response to growing demand and demonstrated impact, Northeastern Center aims to expand to three full-time School-Based Navigators. This would allow for one dedicated provider per school corporation—Garrett-Keyser-Butler, DeKalb Central, and DeKalb Eastern—ensuring equitable access and consistent coverage across the county. Historically, this initiative has been sustained through philanthropic and private grant funding from

sources such as The Health First DeKalb Indiana, The Community Foundation DeKalb County, and other community partners. However, several of these funding opportunities are no longer available for the upcoming academic year. As a result, Northeastern Center is seeking strategic community investment to preserve and grow this vital service. We are respectfully requesting a contribution of \$50,000 from Health First DeKalb Indiana to support this essential behavioral health infrastructure. This request represents a critical piece of the program's funding puzzle and aligns directly with Northeastern Center impact priorities outlined in the 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment—specifically, expanding youth mental health services, reducing service access disparities, and addressing upstream behavioral health needs within the community. Garrett-Keyser-Butler Schools have already committed \$40,000 in support of this program. Northeastern Center is actively pursuing financial buy-in from DeKalb Central and DeKalb Eastern, both of which are currently benefiting from the services but have not yet committed fiscal support. The additional investment from the Board of Health would provide not only financial stability but also a strong signal of inter-agency collaboration and commitment to equitable, school-based mental health care. By investing in this initiative, the Health First DeKalb Indiana will help safeguard a proactive, community-rooted behavioral health program that serves hundreds of youths annually and removes longstanding barriers to care for the most vulnerable students in our community.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY PLAN:**

Northeastern Center is committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the School-Based Navigator program beyond the duration of this grant award. While this funding will provide critical support for program operations in the immediate term, NEC recognizes that ongoing success requires a comprehensive and forward-looking sustainability strategy rooted in collaboration, diversified funding, and data-driven advocacy. A key pillar of the sustainability plan involves building strong financial partnerships with the participating school corporations—Garrett-Keyser-Butler, DeKalb Central, and DeKalb Eastern. NEC will continue engaging with school leadership to secure multi-year financial commitments, reinforcing the shared responsibility for student mental health and wellness. These conversations are already underway, and the program's proven impact positions it well for continued investment. NEC will also continue to seek out additional grant funding opportunities at the local, state, and national levels. Foundations and funding bodies that prioritize mental health, youth development, health equity, and school-based interventions will continue to be lobbied for assistance while long-term sustainability is being secured. NEC has a strong track record of securing competitive funding and will leverage both this history and ongoing outcome data to support future applications. Finally, NEC will pursue efforts to integrate the program into the broader behavioral health reimbursement landscape. This includes advocating for Medicaid and commercial insurance reimbursement for behavioral health navigation services. By collecting outcome data related to access, symptom reduction, and academic performance, NEC intends to build a compelling case for reimbursement and policy change. Finally, NEC will continue to invest in community awareness, stakeholder education, and public advocacy to elevate the value of school-based mental health services. By showcasing the program's success and amplifying its role in improving both health and educational outcomes, NEC will foster a broad base of support from the community, philanthropic partners, and policymakers. Together, these strategies reflect NEC's comprehensive and mission-driven approach to sustaining this impactful program, ensuring that students across DeKalb County have access to consistent, high-quality behavioral health support for years to come.

#### **DIGITAL SIGNATURE:**

*Adrienne Long*