Fulton County Schools
Where Students Come First

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News Release

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Fulton County Schools Expands Texting Program for Teens in Crisis

Fulton County Government Funds Initiative to Relieve Youth Stress and Anxiety

Fulton County Schools (FCS) and Fulton County government have collaborated to expand Text 4 Help, an anonymous crisis text line aimed at providing a valuable resource for students seeking support or an outlet to share concerns. **There will be a presentation for media and school board followed by a training for school administrators Friday, October 26 at 9 a.m. at City Springs, Sandy Springs' City Hall building. After the presentation, media are welcome to interview and ask questions outside the meeting room.**

The program allows teens facing stress or crisis to reach a licensed clinician who will respond within three minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Fulton County District 2 Commissioner Bob Ellis, Vice Chairman of the Commission, introduced the initiative after seeing the tremendous success of the program in the Chicago area.

"We are so proud to be the first in the Southeast to launch the Text 4 Help program," said Vice Chairman Ellis. "Many texting programs are designed for students to report safety concerns, but this initiative links them with a licensed mental health expert who can help them work through all types of issues -- academics, relationships, substance abuse and more. Youth now have someone to turn to round the clock who can offer them support and resources."

Partnering with FCS, the program was launched in January 2018 in several high schools in both the north and south parts of the district, and will be expanded to 10 schools including Alpharetta, Banneker, Cambridge, Chattahoochee, Johns Creek, Langston Hughes, Milton, Riverwood, Roswell and Tri-Cities High Schools. "Text 4 Help's on-demand mental health support is offered in a modality that is best suited for our students", said Chelsea Montgomery, FCS executive director of Counseling, Psychological and Social Work Services. "This partnership exemplifies community collaboration at its best, and will help meet the ongoing social and emotional needs of our students."

Founded by the nonprofit agency Linking Efforts Against Drugs (LEAD) in 2014 in Lake County, IL, by Andy Duran, executive director, the program is now available to 10 million youth nationwide. In Fulton County, the Text 4 Help line is

funded by a grant from the Fulton-Dekalb Hospital Authority, an agency that promotes the health of the greater Atlanta community through oversight of the Grady Memorial Hospital Corporation. Duran will be the featured presenter to share the program's successes, instruct how it works and how to implement it in schools to principals, counselors and social workers of the participating schools.

After the February shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, there was a 600 percent increase in texts related to safety. Text 4 Help is a key resource with suicide prevention, the second leading cause of death among teens, according to the National Center for Health Statistics at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

When a school establishes a program, it selects a unique ID code that students can identify with to accompany the phone number. Texts are routed through a cloaking server to ensure anonymity. The response team currently consists of licensed clinicians from CHRIS 180, an agency that contracts with the Fulton County Department of Behavioral Health. Data is analyzed and shared on a quarterly basis. "CHRIS 180 is a proud partner of the Text 4 Help program," said Monica McGannon, LCSW, Clinical Director of Fulton County, CHRIS 180. "Our licensed clinicians take students' calls and can be a listening ear when they need to talk or ask a question."

FCS and Fulton County hope to eventually expand the program to all 19 high schools in the district, as well as introduce the initiative to students in middle school.

Text 4 Help Kickoff/Training
City Springs
Meeting Room A
1 Galambos Way
Sandy Springs, 30328

Parking in East parking deck, see attached map. First two hours of parking are free. Signage will be provided.

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About the Fulton County School System. The Fulton County School System is the fourth largest school system in Georgia. More than 95,000 students attend 106 schools in the cities of Alpharetta, Chattahoochee Hills, College Park, East Point, Fairburn, Hapeville, Johns Creek, Milton, Mountain Park, Palmetto, Roswell, Sandy Springs, South Fulton and Union City.