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Dear Stakeholder,

The month of May has been declared Mental Health Awareness Month at the state and federal levels. Alabama will celebrate Children's Mental Health Acceptance Week from May 1st through the 7th. This year's theme is Moving from Awareness to Acceptance in 2022.

We have lived through unprecedented times with the worldwide pandemic. Our society has felt the impact in many areas (physical, mental, and economic). While we will be evaluating the impact of the pandemic on our children for years to come, even the casual observer has seen increased anxiety, social disconnectedness, and inappropriate behaviors among our youth. As educational professionals and parents, it is our responsibility to equip our children with the skills they need to succeed in life, including skills to improve their mental health. Also, as leaders in our communities, we must do our part to remove the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.

DCS is committed to partnering with you to prepare our children for a healthy, happy life. We are fortunate to have several resources to assist you. Our district has recently implemented the social-emotional warning system, *Rhithm*. *Rhithm* is a digital platform that helps educators identify students who are at risk, prevent dropouts, and improve the well-being of students. We also have several professionals dedicated to meeting students' mental health needs, including school counselors at every school, district-wide counselors, Shelley Bowling, Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Jackie Walker, Associate Licensed Counselor (ALC), and Community Outreach Coordinator Bruce Jones, Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW). In addition, Family and Engagement Coordinator Latoya Brown, Masters Social Worker (MSW), is available to assist families with emergency needs such as homelessness. The agency, Parents and Children Together (PACT), has also partnered with DCS to provide FACT workers in our schools to assist families.

Parents, guardians, and caregivers can use this web link provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Learn About Children's Mental Health CDC](#) to explore mental health resources. In addition, the National Federation of Families offers additional tips. [CMHA Activities for Youth | National Federation of Families](#).

If you would like to know more about any of the resources we have provided or have questions about helping your child, please do not hesitate to contact your local school counselor or anyone on our mental health team.

All my best,

Stefanie Underwood, Ph.D.  
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