In partnership with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health, housed in the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University, conducted an evaluation of the second year of the Georgia Apex Program and provided technical assistance to each of the community-based mental health providers. Using both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses, the evaluation measured program performance, identified technical assistance needs, and investigated facilitators and barriers to program’s success and sustainability.

THE GEORGIA APEX PROGRAM: SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

YEAR 2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

OVERVIEW
The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities’ Georgia Apex Program creates partnerships between community-based mental health providers and local schools to provide school-based mental health (SBMH) services.

Program Goals
- Detection
- Access
- Coordination

The program’s goals include
1. Increasing access to mental health services for children and youth,
2. Providing early detection of child and adolescent mental health needs, and
3. Increasing coordination between community-based mental health providers and the local schools and school districts they serve.

The APEX Triangle
- MHI Providers
  - Tier III: Intensive Intervention (3-5%)
- Counselors, Social Workers, MH Providers
  - Tier II: Early Intervention (7-10%)
- All School Staff
  - Tier I: Universal Prevention (85-90%)

Year 2 by the Numbers
- 29 community-based mental health providers
- 203 schools served
- 92% retention rate of schools from year 1 to year 2
- 2,822 students served who had not previously received mental health services
- 235 average number of first-time students served each month
- 21 average number of students served per school
- 40,044 services provided in schools
- 11,377 referrals made to Apex services
GEORGIA APEX PROGRAM IMPACT
Twenty-nine community-based mental health providers began administering Apex programs in August 2015. By the end of year 1, the program reached 136 schools and delivered 20,000 services. During year 2, the Apex Program served 203 schools and provided 40,044 services.

The Apex Year-End Survey aids in compiling critical contextual information about the schools served, implementation of the program, and successes and challenges related to billing, sustainability, and collaborative relationships. The following themes emerged.

IDENTIFIED SUCCESSES INCLUDE
- Integration into partnering schools
- Improved coordination and communication between providers and school staff
- Increased access to services for students otherwise not receiving needed help

COMMON CHALLENGES INCLUDE
- Navigating care management organization requirements (e.g., billing, staff credentialing, timely authorization for services)
- Difficulties in scheduling time with students during the school day
- Lack of support and investment from leaders

By June 2017, the Apex program served 203 schools across 66 counties, as seen in the darker shaded areas. To prioritize serving in geographic areas with unmet needs, community-based mental health providers continue to partner with schools in more rural settings.

Activities that were helpful to position the program toward sustainability, include provider integration in the school setting (e.g., participating in school events and serving as a resource to school staff through trainings, crisis intervention, and lunch-and-learns), providing quality care to the students, and using data to demonstrate the