



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brain Health Initiative Announces *SCHOOLS* for BRAIN HEALTH, a Pilot Project in the Suncoast Region

June 22, 2022, LAKEWOOD RANCH, Fla. — Dr. Stephanie Peabody, founder and executive director of the Brain Health Initiative (BHI), announced today that the Suncoast region, beginning with the School District of Manatee County and Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy, has been selected by the BHI to execute a pilot ***Schools for Brain Health*** program. “Through this collaboration, we will develop Brain Healthy School prototypes, which can be replicated and tailored for use by any school,” Dr. Peabody said.

Said Manatee County Superintendent Cynthia Saunders, “This innovative collaboration will initially include six schools in Manatee County, which cover two separate communities, Lakewood Ranch and Bayshore. We’ve been very excited to join forces with the Brain Health Initiative to provide our students, parents/caregivers, and staff with the very latest technology, programming, and data to improve performance while addressing the overall brain health and wellness of our school family.”

Working toward the larger goal of creating Brain Healthy Communities of Excellence, the BHI will lead engagement, research, and innovation efforts regarding ways educating with brain health in mind can have a significant benefit to all life outcomes (e.g., development, maturing, aging, learning, health, well-being, etc.) for the entire school community (e.g., students, parent/caregivers, personnel), as well as the ripple effect to the larger community. Understanding the needs and current state of brain health and illness and innovating brain healthy interventions in partnership with this sector of the community that can be measured, documented, and replicated has the opportunity to impact the greater good, and the results will be published.

Schools for Brain Health has been designed, in large part, based on the brain health community perception and prioritization data collected over the past 24 months from youth and adult stakeholders from across multiple sectors throughout the Suncoast region. Those stakeholders

include personnel and parents from the School Districts of Sarasota and Manatee counties, private and parochial schools, the BHI Brain Health Scholars, youth and human development and service programs, phase 1 of the pilot Brain Health Longitudinal study, and representatives from many other sectors.

Informed by this data, rigorously vetted global brain health partners and solutions were identified to create this unique program. For example, several evidence-based interventions for students, personnel, and parent/caregivers have been curated for potential adoption by the pilot schools (e.g., focus on executive-functioning skill development, cognitive/brain training, social-emotional learning activities, mindfulness training, brain health literacy, nutrition, physical activity, parenting, the learning environment, etc.). Through **Schools for Brain Health**, solutions will be integrated and the impact on increased brain health and performance outcomes for all ages will be explored.

Development of a Brain Healthy Communities of Excellence will cultivate cultures that explicitly operate with brain health and optimizing performance in mind. Said Saunders, "Bringing brain health innovations and brain science-based best practice, curriculum and programming to schools can help to address brain health and performance in education, general health and wellness, and (other) challenges, such as readiness to learn, social and emotional development, school engagement, learning for understanding, learning differences, stress resilience, school start time, school and home nutrition, sleep issues, behavior, depression, anxiety, addictions, childhood obesity, and so much more."

Dr. Peabody said, "Brain health and performance will be integrated in every aspect of the pilot school's culture including: the learning environment (e.g., the building and facilities, seating, desks, cleaning supplies, and lighting); before, during, and after-school programs; food that is served; and outdoor learning and play spaces, including brain training and meditation stations. Instructional methodology and policies will be considered and operate with evidence-based best brain health practices in mind."

The parent/caregivers, personnel, and high school students of participating schools will have the option to participate in annual brain health and performance perception and prioritization surveys. The data gathered from these surveys will be used to identify brain health and well-being needs as perceived by the school community and to set an annual brain health strategic plan.

Through this initiative, to best support optimal brain health and performance, parent/caregivers, students, and staff will also have the opportunity to be screened annually with a confidential brain health and performance check-up. Each participant will receive an annual brain health report card, an index of functioning with evidence-based suggestions for optimizing performance, which will be key to enhancing health, social and emotional learning, cognitive development, and overall academic and well-being outcomes. This data will identify

trends and needs across the school culture, such as nutrition, physical activity, cognitive development, or stress resilience and lead to the identification of programming to support the community needs. This data will help analyze individual needs to support learning and well-being — identifying the earliest markers of potential health, social-emotional, or learning concerns, which can prevent future challenges, and optimize performance outcomes.”

Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy, Lakewood Ranch’s newest K-12 public charter school, has been selected by the Brain Health Initiative to develop the world's first Brain Healthy School **from the ground up**. Bradley Warren, principal of Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy Lower School, said, “It fits perfectly with our W.I.S.H. model that focuses on Wellness, Innovation, Science, and Health.”

Dr. Peabody said, “As LWR Prep builds its facilities, the Brain Health Initiative faculty are disseminating evidence to LWR Prep leadership related to how school buildings impact the health, thinking, and productivity of students and teachers every day. The science demonstrates that the environment and contextual factors influence academic performance and short- and long-term health indicators.”

Warren said, “Investing in our schools from a physical and brain health and performance perspective, including our building and grounds, is an investment in our collective future. This unequivocal science that the Brain Health Initiative is championing is being considered for integration into our decisions about our entire educational approach, programming, and operations, beginning, for example, with the building, facilities, and furnishings (e.g., lighting, ventilation, and indoor air quality, water quality, thermal health, views, acoustics and noise, safety and security, green and play space, etc.). This novel comprehensive focus on brain health and performance and the partnership between Lakewood Ranch Prep and the Brain Health Initiative will ensure that the entire school family – including staff, students, parents/caregivers, grandparents, and the greater community – have ready access to state-of-the-art methods to increase brain health and performance outcomes.”

Through the **Schools for Brain Health** initiative, schools in the Suncoast region, beginning with Manatee County, will work toward certification as a Brain Health School Center of Excellence. These schools will serve as prototypes that can be replicated, enhancing brain health, optimizing brain performance, and decreasing risk of brain illness for all ages and across the region and beyond. BHI has had multiple national and global interests from public, private, parochial, and charter schools to participate in and benefit from **Schools for Brain Health**.

About Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative, Inc. (BHI), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that promote brain

healthy lifestyles, foster protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes at the individual and community level for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. ***Brain Health Matters and Lifestyle Makes a Difference.***

Media Contacts:

- For School District of Manatee County Mike Barber (941) 708-8870 x41283 or barberm@manateeschools.net
- *For Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy*
Colleen Reynolds, APR
(239) 849-6400 or edgecommunications@comcast.net
- *For Brain Health Initiative*
Admin@brainhealthinitiative.org