



We Urge Lawmakers to Create a Student Mental Health Allotment to Fill a Major Gap in the Legislature's Mental Health Plan

May 11, 2023

During the remaining weeks of this session, we urge the Legislature to create and fund a Student Mental Health Allotment to provide school districts with funding to support student mental health. There are multiple legislative vehicles available to lawmakers, including Mental Health Allotment bills, school funding bills, and school safety bills. The state does not currently provide dedicated student mental health funding to school districts.

The Legislature is taking important, positive steps this session to address children's mental health — but there is a major gap in the bills that are moving. The Legislature's mental health plan needs to reach a much larger number of children and include support for prevention and other strategies that reach children before a crisis.

- **The Legislature is considering improving support for children in crisis by increasing funding for hospital beds, crisis stabilization units, and youth mobile crisis outreach teams.** Those are critical steps for supporting children in crisis, but it is also important to reach children before they are in crisis.
- **The Legislature is considering expanding the reach of the TCHATT telemedicine program.** We strongly support TCHATT and the proposed expansion. However, these intensive services reach a very small number of children, and they do not include prevention services. TCHATT provided services to 0.3% of the students on the campuses it served in fiscal year 2022. By contrast, in 2021, 33% of Texas high school students reported persistently feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed during the previous month and 22% seriously considered suicide, according to the Texas Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- **The Legislature is considering increasing Mental Health First Aid requirements for teachers.** However, if teachers use that training to identify a student who is struggling, they need to be able to refer that student to someone for support. In some cases, TCHATT may be able to help, but only if the campus has the staffing and technology in place to use TCHATT.
- **The Legislature is considering expanding schools' ability to use the SHARS program to bill Medicaid health insurance for services.** It's an important step forward, but it is limited to schools that choose to participate, medical services billable to health insurance, and limited to students enrolled in Medicaid.
- **The Legislature is considering expanding the School Safety Allotment (SSA),** which school districts are allowed to use to fund mental health strategies. However, districts may need to use the entirety of the SSA to comply with new school security requirements.

(Over)

A Student Mental Health Allotment would fill this gap, strengthening prevention and early intervention strategies that reach children before they are in crisis. It would allow districts to:

- Hire counselors, social workers, TCHATT liaisons, or other staff to support mental health.
- Collaborate with community-based organizations like Local Mental Health Authorities to provide options for parents who decide to seek mental health support for their kids.
- Implement programs to prevent suicide, bullying, and substance use.
- Help students develop skills to manage anxiety and conflict in order to promote a positive school climate.

Campuses would see significant benefits in learning and academic performance, student health and safety, and student behavior.

- Students will be better equipped to focus on math, reading, writing, science, etc.
- Students will be less likely to hurt themselves — or others.
- Students will be less likely to disrupt classes, bully other students, and act out.

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Resource Members:

The Texas Coalition for Healthy Minds advocates for the health and well-being of all individuals living in our state impacted by or at risk of mental health and substance use disorders. Collectively, our organizations represent thousands of doctors, psychologists, counselors, social workers, mental health professionals, and other advocates promoting policies that prioritize prevention, identification, treatment, and support.

For More Information:

Seth Winick 512.470.2233
 director@coalitionhealthyminds.org

@TXHealthyMinds
 www.coalitionhealthyminds.org