

Providing a Pathway to Connect More Eligible Texas Children to Health Services in Schools

Support House Bill 1571 by Representative J.M. Lozano

With HB 1571, Texas would provide a pathway to connect more eligible children to health services by allowing schools to receive Medicaid reimbursement for health or mental health services when delivered at school to a child in Medicaid. Currently, schools can only receive Medicaid reimbursement for services to students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

For example, under HB 1571, a student can continue to receive hearing and vision tests or nursing services at school; and the school could be reimbursed if he is enrolled in Medicaid. A high school student with Cerebral Palsy who needs regular physical therapy could receive those services at school — rather than leaving campus in the middle of classes to attend physical therapy — if she is enrolled in Medicaid.

Schools are an increasingly important place for specific children to access services with approval of their parents.

Texas schools have become an important place for students to access services that are available to them, including mental health support, physical therapy, speech therapy, and nursing care. All services are provided with the approval of a student's parents. However, this care is only Medicaid reimbursable for a specific population of students. Currently, under the School Health and Related Services (SHARS) program, **Texas schools are able to receive Medicaid reimbursement for delivery of certain health-related services, but *only* for students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP, the plan developed for every student in Special Education).**

Texas is missing an opportunity to help additional eligible students get coverage and care by using a policy implemented in other states.

Changes to federal policy in 2014 have enabled schools in other states to be reimbursed for Medicaid-covered health services provided to a Medicaid-eligible student, regardless of whether their service is under an IEP. This policy change has allowed 13 states — such as Florida, Missouri, South

Carolina, Louisiana, and Utah, among others – to broaden the scope of services offered in schools, serve more students, and cover costs through a mix of federal and state Medicaid funds.¹ **However, Texas has not taken advantage of this option. Texas is missing out on federal funds that could help cover costs of health services and nursing care in schools.**

HB 1571 would help provide necessary health-related services in schools to students enrolled in Medicaid even if they are not in a student’s IEP.

Some Texas school districts are able to identify local funding to partner with mental health providers and offer mental health support to students with their parents’ approval; but Texas currently does *not* provide dedicated funding to support these school-based health services. Many school districts around the state currently provide a range of services to students without an IEP – including nursing care, hearing and vision tests, and mental health supports – but they do so by absorbing the cost since the state does not reimburse for these services to students without an IEP.

Passing HB 1571 would allow schools to receive Medicaid reimbursement for services – such as mental health, different therapies, and nursing care – delivered to a Medicaid-enrolled student. **With this step, the state could draw down federal funding, schools could spend more of their education funds to support classroom environments, parents could avoid missing work to take their children to appointments, and students would have greater access to physical and mental health care.**



¹ “Recent Changes to the Free Care Rule Put Federal Funds Back on the Table.” Georgetown Center For Children and Families, 14 July 2016, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2016/05/06/recent-changes-free-care-rule-put-federal-funds-back-table/#:~:text=The%20so%2Dcalled%20E2%80%9CFree%20Care,these%20services%20for%20its%20beneficiaries>