School Mental Health Allotment

Background
Texas students face considerable obstacles to learning, including significant mental health needs, community violence, and other personal crises. Recently, rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation have drastically increased among students. However, many schools do not have the resources necessary to adequately support student mental health needs. Currently, school districts do not receive state funding explicitly for student mental health services. To mitigate this public health crisis, the Legislature should create a School Mental Health Allotment that directs dollars to districts to support the safety and well-being of all Texas students and their academic success.

The Problem
Texas ranks 41 out of 50 states for overall youth mental health. Although schools have a School Safety Allotment, created in 2019, this funding was predominately spent on physical safety measures. Only 12% of districts spent any on mental health support for students. Currently, the ratio for school social workers to students is 1:5309, which falls short of the national recommended ratio of 1:250. With minimal funding for school social workers, students continue to suffer from increasing rates of mental health issues, school violence, racial tension, and social inequities. These challenges can go unnoticed without early identification and worsen without timely intervention from professionally trained staff.

Prevalence of Youth Mental Health Issues
- Anxiety and depression diagnoses have increased by nearly 30% among students since 2016.
- 73.1% of Texas youth diagnosed with depression go untreated.
- Community violence increases risk of mental health conditions for students by 81%.
- Strong evidence links mental health issues and difficulties with learning including concentration, memory, motivation, and decision making.

Dollars to Districts
- **Improved Educational Outcomes**: Increasing access to mental health can improve student learning and their educational environment, leading to better overall life outcomes.
- **Crisis Assessment and Prevention**: School-based crisis assessment and community violence prevention can help improve student health and safety. Increasing school social workers trained in these skills can cultivate safer environments and promote student well-being.
- **A School Mental Health Allotment Fund** would ensure schools have the financial resources to employ qualified personnel to implement evidence-based strategies that promote student mental health and community well-being.

School Social Workers Can Provide:
- Crisis assessment and intervention
- Mental health counseling
- Facilitation of support groups
- Clinical case management
- Parent support services
- Truancy and dropout interventions
- Connections to community resources

Contact: Bryan Mares, NASW-TX Government Relations Director
bmares.naswtx@socialworkers.org
References


4. Texas Education Agency, Open Records Request. Number of state employed school social workers (received 2020) [on file with author].

