



87th Legislative Session

# Texas PTA Legislative Priority

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## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Monitor implementation of mental health legislation, including programs and services designed to help keep students mentally strong and prepared to cope, as well as systems to identify students in need of intervention. Monitor mental health legislation that is filed in the 87th legislative session.

### BACKGROUND

Following the shooting at Santa Fe High School, Governor Abbott named school safety and children's mental health priority issues. As a result, the Texas Legislature took significant action during the 2019 session to ensure schools, doctors, and mental health providers are better equipped to prevent and address social, emotional, and mental health challenges among Texas children.

The Legislature passed House Bills 18 and 19, two pieces of legislation that ensure schools are better equipped to address a range of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that can interfere with students' health and education.

- HB 18 establishes training, policy, and planning requirements for school districts related to student mental health, the use of trauma-informed practices, and helping students develop social and emotional skills and learn about mental health.
- HB 19 allows non-physician mental health professionals to be available as a dedicated resource to help schools meet these new requirements. Employed by local mental health authorities, but working at each of the 20 education service centers (ESCs) in the state, they will provide school personnel with training and consultation services on using effective practices related to student mental health, trauma-informed practice, and substance use.

### MENTAL HEALTH FACTS

- According to the World Health Organization, half of all mental health conditions manifest by age 14, and interventions are most effective at the early stages of onset when symptoms are less severe.
- According to the National Institute of Health, mental illness is not the driving factor of violence; those with diagnosed mental health conditions are more likely to hurt themselves or be hurt by someone else than to harm another individual.
- Over the past 10 years, attempted suicide rates among Texas high school students have increased from 8.4% to 12.3%, and attempts requiring medical treatment increased from 2.6% to 4.5%.

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- According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for Texans and the third leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 24.
- Early identification and treatments are key to dealing with these populations. The Centers for Disease Control identifies campus connectedness as an important factor to prevent risk behaviors and improve academic achievement.
- When schools fully implement comprehensive school counseling programs, students feel safer, disciplinary referrals decline, attendance rates increase, and students are more likely to pursue post-secondary degrees.
- According to the American Psychological Association, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 15% to 20% of students could be expected to be identified as needing support through screening; this percentage will almost certainly be higher given the potential emotional fallout of the pandemic.

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