



# Official 89th Texas Legislative Session Platform

**Increase Access to Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services to Improve School Climate and Student Outcomes:** Across the state there is growing recognition of the importance of meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of children and youth, and the critical role of schools in doing this work. Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services are most effective when embedded within an MTSS framework. Services in schools improve students' ability to learn. Collaborative community partnerships are also vital to provide services beyond the school day. Comprehensive services require an adequate ratio of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students in order to allow for the delivery of a full continuum of school psychological services. The national ratio is 1 school psychologist for every 1,119 students. In Texas, the ratio is 1 school psychologist for every 2,617 students. Additionally, numerous rural counties have one school psychologist or none in the area. High school psychologists to student ratios and shortages prevent school psychologists from providing mental health support all children need.

## Actions Needed

- Create a School Mental Health allotment that directs dedicated funding to school districts for strategies that support comprehensive school mental health services and improve school climate, as well as reduce disparities in mental health service delivery, especially among underserved populations.
- Adequately fund partnerships that prioritize keeping youth in their communities with their families and create safe and supportive schools.
- Extend behavioral health services to all children in Medicaid through the SHARS program.
- Support adoption of specific and comprehensive Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) benchmarks to be added to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and mandate districts to adopt a SEL curriculum.
- Approve a change in title from Licensed Specialist in School Psychology to School Psychologist to align with rules.
- Support supplements to salaries of school psychologists having certain credentials issued by the National School Psychology Certification Board.
- Establish the School Psychologist Recruitment and Retention Program within the Texas Education Agency to provide professional development programs and aid for school psychologists and individuals seeking to become school psychologists.
- Allows students to have excused absences to take care of their mental health.
- Request that legislators codify the national practice model as identified by the National Association of School Psychologists into the Occupational Code and Education Code of Texas to uphold best practices related to school-based psychological services.
- Support a full seat on the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists to ensure school psychologists are represented on the Board.
- Ensure the Texas Education Agency and other relevant agencies prioritize technical assistance and guidance to support state and district efforts to recruit and retain school psychologists. This includes a long-term and sustained commitment to align staffing ratios with recommendations generated from national professional organizations.
- Increase funding for grants/scholarships to train school psychologists, especially school psychologists that match an increasingly diverse student population
- Ensure state loan forgiveness programs and financial assistance programs include licensed specialists in school psychology.
- Provide funding and support for the re-training of closely related professionals to meet state credentialing requirements to practice as school psychologists.

**Promote Best Practices for Safe and Supportive Schools to Ensure that Every Student Succeeds:** School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Schools play a critical and irreplaceable role in keeping students safe and supporting mental health. The best solution for ensuring that schools remain safe is to create a culture and climate in which students feel connected enough to responsible adults in the building to report any concerns that may arise. Efforts to prevent violence must align with efforts to improve school climate, overall safety, and learning. These are not separate endeavors and must be designed, funded, and implemented as a comprehensive school-wide approach. Best practices are non-discriminatory and empower families and communities. School psychologists promote culturally-responsive professional practices and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.

## Actions Needed

- Promote comprehensive school safety efforts that emphasize both physical and psychological safety.
- Reject efforts to overly harden schools or to require physical security measures that are not evidence based or that do not increase actual or perceived safety.
- Ensure school mental health services, including social-emotional learning, mental wellness, resilience, and positive connections between students and adults, are an essential component of all comprehensive school safety efforts.
- Support elimination of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in school settings.
- Promote policies, rules, and laws that align with the National Association of School Psychologists Principles for Professional Ethics.
- Support legislation, regulation, and policies that promote the use of effective, positive school discipline that is not overly punitive (e.g., zero tolerance).
- Coordinate efforts among school-based professionals who support physical and psychological safety that align with *A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools*, a document specifically created in collaboration with the National Association of School Resource Officers.
- Support funding for high-quality, evidence-based, and job-embedded and discipline specific professional development for educators, specialized instructional support personnel, and other relevant staff in areas including but not limited to: implicit bias, anti bullying, anti harassment, and anti discrimination efforts; evidence-based threat assessment and management procedures; school-based violence prevention; positive discipline strategies; and restorative justice practices. All professional development should be culturally responsive.
- Support legislation, regulation, and policies that promote non-discriminatory practices.

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**TASP’s Mission Statement:** The Texas Association of School Psychologists is a professional organization that supports and advocates for school psychologists having a positive impact on school systems to improve academic skills, social-emotional functioning, and mental-behavioral health for all students.

The TASP Executive Board engages in actions and activities that seek to positively influence outcomes directly affecting the lives of the students, families, and schools we serve. Legislative members and staffers seeking additional information regarding Academic Interventions and Instructional Supports, Mental and Behavioral Health Services and Interventions, School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning, and Services to Promote Safe and Supportive Schools are encouraged to contact the TASP Executive Board for additional resources.

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