

Children's Mental Health

2018 Georgia Legislative Session Report



Prepared for Georgia Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children
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May 24, 2018

The recent Legislative Session capped an extraordinary year for children's mental health in Georgia. The General Assembly appropriated funding for recommendations from The Commission on Children's Mental Health, including additional funding for school based mental health through the Georgia Apex Program. The Georgia Department of Education received funding for mental health awareness training in schools. Two bills were passed on school climate and school suspensions that could have significant impact on early interventions and mental health depending on implementation by schools and school systems. Both the House and Senate created subcommittees on school safety.

Approved Funding for Recommendations from The Commission on Children's Mental Health

- **Opioid Use Prevention:** Increased funds to prevent opioid abuse by children and youth by \$790,801.
- **Crisis Services:** Increased funds for crisis services by \$10,316,198 (and additional one-time funds for crisis respite of \$84,000).
- **Georgia Apex Program (School Based Mental Health):** Increased funds for Georgia Apex for an additional 13 grants by \$4,290,000. Georgia Apex is a three-year pilot project that has developed school based mental health services in schools across the state. Last year, Georgia Apex had 29 grantees working with 214 of the more than 2,200 schools in Georgia. More information can be found in the Georgia Apex Two Year Evaluation Report at http://gacoeonline.gsu.edu/files/2018/03/Apex-Year-2-Evaluation-Report_Final.pdf
- **Telemedicine:** Provided funds for telemedicine \$232,500 (and additional one-time funds of \$150,000).
- **Suicide Prevention:** Increased funds for suicide prevention by \$1,092,000.
- **Wrap Around Training:** Increased funds for high fidelity wraparound services training by \$610,545.
- **Supported Employment Training for Young Adults:** Increased funds for supported employment and education assistance for 500 young adults \$6,120 per year totaling \$1,530,000.
- **Mental Health Crisis and Suicide Prevention App:** Provided funds for a statewide application in coordination with the Georgia Crisis and Access hotline related to mental health crisis services and suicide prevention in the amount of \$1,416,611.
- **Care Coordinator Positions for Children in Foster Care:** Provided funds to the Department of Human Services for care coordinator positions to improve mental health outcomes for children in foster care in the amount of \$2,464,928.



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Funding for Mental Health Awareness Training in Schools

- **Student Mental Health Awareness Training:** Provided funding for mental health awareness training in schools in the amount of \$1,600,000. The new crisis and access line app will be promoted through the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program and the mental health awareness trainings.

Children's Suspensions & School Climate

- **Student Attendance and School Climate Committees in Each County (HB 763):** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2 was amended so that Student Attendance Protocol Committees appointed by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of each county shall now be Student Attendance and School Climate Committees. The purpose of the committees will now also include coordination and cooperation of officials, agencies, and programs “to improve the school climate.” The committees “may recommend the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports and response to intervention, *trauma informed care training*, and the optimization of local resources”
- **School Safety Plans Include Mental Health Awareness (HB 763):** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1185 was amended so that juvenile courts will provide input into school safety plans. Additionally, it was amended so that school safety plans shall include “[t]raining school administrators, teachers, and support staff, including, but not limited to, school resource officers, security officers, secretaries, custodians and bus drivers, on school violence prevention, school security, school threat assessment, *mental health awareness*. . . .”
- **Suspensions for Preschool through Third Grade/Multi-Tiered System of Support (HB 740):** Schools will not be allowed to suspend children from preschool through third grade for more than five days, with limited exceptions, until after the children are provided a multi-tiered system of support such as response to intervention. If a child has an IEP or Section 504 Plan, then the school must convene the IEP or 504 team to review appropriate supports prior to suspension for more than five days. Depending on how this law is interpreted and implemented, it could encourage early behavioral health interventions for young children.

Study Committees on School Safety May Impact Children's Mental Health

- **House and Senate Study Committees on School Safety:** Both the House and Senate created Study Committees on School Safety. These Study Committees may impact children's mental health, depending on the recommendations made.

Additional Legislation & Committee Established

School Nurses and Counselors Count: Language in the Appropriations law directs the Department of Education to provide a report on the number of counselors and nurses per school and school system to the General Assembly by September 1, 2018.

House Study Committee on Incorporating Law Enforcement in Pathway to Treatment (HB 913): This Study Committee will examine the potential to expand community behavioral health services available through law enforcement diversion.

