

THE  
CARTER CENTER



## **Southwest Georgia Forum to Address Unmet Mental Health Needs for Georgia's Children to be Held Sept. 13 in Albany**

*The Carter Center, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, and Voices for Georgia's Children Hold School-Based Mental Health Forum in Southwest Georgia to Advance Mental Health and Well-Being in Children*

ATLANTA...The second of six regional School-Based Behavioral Health Forums across Georgia will convene at Albany State University on Sept. 13 (more details below). These forums – co-hosted by The Carter Center, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, and Voices for Georgia's Children – assess the status of school-based behavioral health efforts in Georgia, identify and eliminate barriers to success, and encourage the adoption of national best practices. During the forum, panelists will focus on school-based behavioral health in the southwest Georgia region. Educators, parents, policy leaders, behavioral health experts and providers are encouraged to attend this public forum. The first in the series of six forums was held in Atlanta on April 15. More information on that event is [here](#).

“Almost 20 percent of children and adolescents in Georgia have a diagnosed mental health disorder. So much can be done to prevent and minimize the effects of illness if we intervene early by providing the supports and care children and their families need” said Carter Center Mental Health Program Director Eve Byrd. “We saw from the attendance and discussions at our first forum that there is tremendous interest from a variety of community members in preventing behavioral health disorders and promoting mental health and well-being in children through school-based programming.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the estimate of Georgia's children and adolescents aged 2-17 who had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder in 2016 is the same as the national rate: 18.3 percent.

“The nation is at a tipping point to address children's mental health and well-being,” said Talley Wells, executive director at Georgia Appleseed. “Although Georgia has made important progress, we need to work together to increase the capacity of our schools to support interventions for children through access to mental health providers in schools and provide early intervention and prevention supports and services to children and their families.”

Examples of the mental health and development issues experienced by youth in the U.S. include stress, anxiety, bullying, family problems, depression, learning disabilities, and alcohol and substance abuse. Left untreated, youth are more likely to experience academic failure, absenteeism, involvement with the criminal justice system, and in some cases, impulses to inflict self-harm or attempt suicide.

“There are lots of conversations now about school and community safety, and it is important to realize that helping children and youth achieve good mental health- and maintain it - is where safety actually starts,” says Dr. Erica Fener Sitkoff, executive director of Voices for Georgia’s Children. “We owe it to our children and ourselves to make sure we provide schools with the best information, workforce, tools and supports we can to make this happen.”

The two most common metrics to assess a state’s ability to serve mental health needs in children are the availability of mental health providers in schools and the use of an evidence-based school climate approach. Georgia uses Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in many of its school districts. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp recently pledged an additional \$8.4 million to the Apex program, a program started in 2015 by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities that pays for mental health providers to be available in schools. This increase in funding is expected to increase coverage of mental health providers in schools to almost 20 percent of Georgia’s schools by 2020.

#### **Editor’s Note:**

- Media wishing to attend the Georgia Southwestern School-Based Behavioral Health Forum must RSVP by Sept. 12 at 12 p.m. to Rennie Sloan (404-420-5129, [rennie.sloan@cartercenter.org](mailto:rennie.sloan@cartercenter.org)).
- The public is encouraged to register to attend the event, which will take place at Albany State University in the Billy Black Building. The address is 504 College Drive, Albany, Ga, 31705. Registration must be completed by Sept. 10 at 12 p.m. Register here: [https://www.cartercenter.org/health/mental\\_health/school\\_based/index.html](https://www.cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/school_based/index.html). Limited walk-ins will be accepted.
- Learn more about the Carter Center's Georgia mental health crisis efforts: [http://cartercenter.org/health/mental\\_health/georgia-crisis.html](http://cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/georgia-crisis.html)
- Portions of the forum will be livestreamed on Twitter via @cartercenter. During the forum, you can join the conversation using #GASchoolbasedmentalhealth on Twitter.

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**Southwest Georgia School-Based Behavioral Health Forum**  
*Supporting Children's Mental and Emotional Well-Being*

- 11:15 a.m.                   REGISTRATION AND LUNCH
- 12:00 p.m.                   OPENING REMARKS  
  
Terrence Wilson, Staff Attorney, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
- 12:05 p.m.                   YOUTH REMARKS  
  
Cherrelle Nieves
- 12:10 p.m.                   WELCOME  
  
Ken Dyer, MBA, Superintendent, Dougherty County School District
- 12:30 p.m.                   PANEL I: OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
(SBBH)  
  
*Defining school-based behavioral health and the status in Georgia*  
  
Moderator – Madison McClung, Reporter, WALB Albany  
  
Panelists:  
  
Dimple Desai, MSW, Georgia State University, Center of Excellence for  
Children's Behavioral Health  
  
Lisa Bailey, MSW Lee County System Social Worker  
  
Erica Fener-Sitkoff, Ph.D., Executive Director, Voices for Georgia's Children  
  
Garry W. McGiboney, Ph.D. Deputy Superintendent, Office of School Safety and  
Climate, Georgia Department of Education

1:10 p.m.

**PANEL II: MODELS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

*Implementation of school-based behavioral health in SW Georgia*

**Moderator – Talley Wells, JD, MEd**, Executive Director, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

**Panelists:**

**Nicole Patten, MSW, LCSW**, Youth and Young Adult Services Coordinator, Aspire Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

**Clifton Bush, MHA**, Chief Operating Officer, Albany Area Primary Health Care Inc.

**Wilena McClain**, Wraparound Coordinator, Dougherty County School System

1:50 p.m.

**NETWORKING BREAK**

2:20 p.m.

**PANEL III: OVERCOMING WORKFORCE BARRIERS**

*Addressing the shortage of workforce as a barrier to expanding access to SBBH*

**Moderator – Brittney Newton MPH**, Policy Analyst, Voices for Georgia's Children

**Panelists:**

**Todd Jones**, Children, Youth and Families Program Specialist, Region 4, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

**Barbara Nowak, PhD, LCSW**, Chair, Department of Social Work, Albany State University,

**Annie Lewis, EdD**, Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling and Educational Leadership, Albany State University

**Samantha Boatwright, LCSW**, Georgia Apex Project Team Leader, Georgia Pines Community Services Board

3:00 p.m.

**PANEL IV: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT  
WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**

*Addressing parents' and caregivers' engagement as a barrier to improving access to SBBH*

**Moderator – Terrence Wilson, JD, MPA, Staff Attorney, Georgia Appleseed  
Center for Law and Justice**

**Panelists:**

**Bronwyn Ragan-Martin, PhD, Superintendent, Early County Georgia**

**Kim Jones, National Alliance on Mental Illness - Georgia**

**Vickie Hill, The Struggle Within, TEAP Specialist, Turner Job Corps Center**

**Simone Turner, Regional Program Manager, Communities in Schools**

3:40 p.m.

**RECAP and NEXT STEPS**

**Eve Byrd, DNP, MPH, The Carter Center Mental Health Program**

4:00 p.m.

**Youth Remarks**

**Javanese Williams**

4:05 p.m.

**ADJOURN**