

SUBJECT: Establishing a task force to study public school mental health services

COMMITTEE: Public Health — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — S. Thompson, Allison, Coleman, Frank, Guerra, Lucio, Ortega,
Price, Sheffield, Zedler

0 nays

1 absent — Wray

WITNESSES: For — Annalee Gulley, Mental Health America of Greater Houston;
Ashley Arnold, Texas Association of School Psychologists; Denise
Zimmermann; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Colby Nichols, Austin ISD;
Jason Sabo, Children at Risk; Bill Kelly, City of Houston Mayor's Office;
Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Jeff Miller, Disability
Rights Texas; Claire Bocchini, Erica Ding, Melinda Soeung, and Alyssa
Thomason, Doctors for Change; Ashlea Turner, Houston ISD; Lindsay
Lanagan, Legacy Community Health; Christine Yanas, Methodist
Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.; Eric Kunish, National Alliance
on Mental Illness-Austin; Alissa Sughrue, National Alliance on Mental
Illness-Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-
Texas; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; Tom Banning, Texas
Academy of Family Physicians; Patty Quinzi, Texas American Federation
of Teachers; Dax Gonzalez, Texas Association of School Boards; Paige
Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Jan Friese, Texas
Counseling Association; Reginald Smith, Texas Criminal Justice
Coalition; Michelle Romero, Texas Medical Association; Darren Grissom
and Carol Grothues, Texas Psychological Association; Lisa Dawn-Fisher,
Texas State Teachers Association; Jennifer Lucy, TexProtects; Kyle
Piccola, The Arc of Texas; Nataly Saucedo, United Ways of Texas; Knox
Kimberly, Upbring; and 21 individuals)

Against — Alice Linahan, Women on the Wall

On — Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; Alycia Welch,

Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health University of Texas at Austin; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Trina Ita, Health and Human Services Commission)

DIGEST:

CSHB 906 would establish the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services to study and evaluate state-funded mental health services provided at school districts or open-enrollment charter schools to enrolled students, students' parents or family members, or school employees. The task force also would evaluate mental health services training provided to educators and the impact of the provided mental health services.

Duties. The task force would have to gather data on:

- the number of enrolled students in each school district and charter school;
- the number of individuals to whom each school district or charter school provided mental health services;
- the number of individuals to whom each school district or charter school had the resources to provide mental health services; and
- the race, ethnicity, gender, special education status, and geographic location of individuals who were provided mental health services.

The bill would require the task force to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the provided mental health services, the provided mental health services training, and the impact of those services. The task force would evaluate the effectiveness of programs, including in:

- improving student academic achievement and attendance;
- reducing student disciplinary proceedings;
- providing prevention and intervention services to promote early mental health;
- preventing substance abuse and suicide;
- reducing violence in the district or school; and
- promoting a positive school climate and improving physical and

emotional safety and well-being in the school, among other areas specified in the bill.

The task force also would address best practices to replicate services or training for all districts and schools and note disparities in race, gender, and other criteria of individuals receiving the services.

Membership. The task force would be composed of the commissioner of education or the commissioner's designee and the following commissioner-appointed members:

- three parents of students who received state-funded mental health services provided at a school;
- one person who provided those services or related training and who was a licensed professional counselor, clinical social worker, or certified school counselor;
- one psychiatrist;
- two administrators of districts or schools that provided mental health services or training;
- one person who was a member of a foundation that invested in mental health services or training offered at schools;
- one person who is an employee of the higher education institution with experience in evaluating mental health services;
- one licensed specialist in school psychology; and
- one representative from any other entity the task force deemed necessary.

At its initial meeting, the task force would choose a presiding officer from among its members. After its initial organizational meeting, the task force would have to meet at least twice each year and could meet by teleconference. Members of the task force could not receive compensation or reimbursement for their service on the force.

The bill would require the commissioner of education to designate three public institutions of higher education with experience in evaluating mental health services to serve on or assist the task force. One institution

would serve as the lead institution for the task force and provide faculty, staff, and administrative support services. Two institutions would assist the task force and lead institution as the task force deemed necessary. In designating the participating institutions of higher education, the commissioner would give preference to at least one predominantly black institution as defined by federal law.

Funding. The commissioner of education could not provide for task force purposes more than 10 percent of state funds allocated to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for public school mental health services. The bill would prohibit the task force from spending more than 10 percent of any money allocated to it for administrative expenses. The task force could accept gifts or grants from a private individual, a foundation, or the federal government.

Report. By November 1 of each even-numbered year, the task force would have to submit a report of the results of its activities and any legislative recommendations to the governor, lieutenant governor, House speaker, and the TEA.

Effective dates. By October 1, 2019, the commissioner of education would have to appoint the members of the task force and designate institutions of higher education to provide support services. The task force would be abolished on December 1, 2025.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 906 would establish a task force to evaluate state-funded mental health services at public and charter schools, which would help ensure those services operated efficiently and produced positive outcomes for students. Schools are often the first point of contact for students with mental health issues, and undiagnosed mental health conditions can negatively affect students' academic performance, behavior, and school attendance. By requiring the task force to study the status of schools'

mental health services and training, the bill would help remove inconsistencies in providing such services across the state. During this legislative session there have been multiple proposals for increasing state spending on mental health programs, and this bill would ensure schools are using those funds resourcefully.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 906 would not address the primary reasons for the rise in students' mental health issues and so would not be effective in improving mental health care. Schools increasingly are focusing on students' behavioral health rather than their academic performance, which could have undesirable consequences.