

ATPE'S PRIORITIES FOR THE 87th LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

Prioritize mental health support for the school community

ATPE supports efforts to provide greater resources for the mental health and social and emotional needs of public school students and staff.

Educators have long known that when schools foster the social, emotional, and mental health of both students and staff, the stage is set for successful learning.

To ensure public school students and educators can thrive and succeed, the Legislature must build upon improvements made to mental health services during the 2019 session. These included mental health training for educators through updated certification and continuing

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professional education requirements, as well as curricular changes to increase awareness of mental health and substance abuse issues among students. The 86th Legislature created the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium (TCMHCC), which was allotted \$99

million to enhance behavioral health telemedicine options across the state, among other initiatives. Lawmakers also created the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services, which is tasked with studying and evaluating the state-funded mental health services provided to students, families, and employees in public schools.

In 2019, lawmakers also appropriated funds to place one non-physician mental health professional at each of

the state's education service centers to provide guidance to districts and serve as a mental health and substance abuse resource, even providing monthly training to educators. The Legislature also funded the \$100 million school safety allotment, which, though limited, can be used to employ much-needed counselors in Texas public schools. Counselors have increasingly been called upon to provide services to students and parents during the pandemic, and the challenges of COVID-19 have highlighted the need to maintain and improve funding for other school-based mental health resources.

In these challenging times, mental health cannot be overlooked. The Legislature's previous improvements play a role in mitigating mental health concerns among students and staff, which makes their continuation and the expansion of similar initiatives crucial to public education. ATPE urges lawmakers to continue to prioritize resources for the mental health and social and emotional needs of public school students and staff.

AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

Learn more about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Texas students and educators in *An Impossible Situation*, a special report from ATPE Governmental Relations. The report, which analyzes three ATPE surveys from summer and fall 2020, is available at atpe.org/COVID-19-Survey-Results.