

## Background:

Over the past two decades, Texas students have been experiencing an increase in mental health concerns. More students are struggling with anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation than before. All schools have students with past or ongoing trauma and stressors outside of school. Trauma can present as difficulty concentrating, low motivation, and more. Promoting mental well-being and supporting student mental health helps ensure student engagement in class, as well as establishing a positive school climate and increasing overall school safety.<sup>1</sup>

There are initiatives in Texas to support child and youth mental health, such as the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) program and various community-based mental health services. However, these mental health programs are often limited in capacity to serve youth or are intended to support children and youth with diagnosable disorders through medical professionals or mental health providers. Many students without a diagnosable disorder are also struggling and in need of early, less intensive interventions or tools to promote their own mental well-being in order to prevent the need for more intensive interventions.

At the same time, more than 100,000 students are experiencing homelessness in Texas each school year. When students don't get a good night's sleep, don't know where they will get dinner or sleep that night, don't have clothes or clean clothes, or don't have easy access to transportation to get to school, it substantially impacts their education. While schools have liaisons to identify and support students experiencing homelessness, those liaisons often do not have the resources to help meet the unique needs of these students.

## Snapshot: Students with Trauma in Our Schools

- There are over 11,000 school-aged students in Texas schools who are in foster care on any given day.
- Over 3.4 million Texas students are identified as Economically Disadvantaged (62%).<sup>2</sup>
- In the 2022-2023 School Year, there were about 114,000 K-12 students experiencing homelessness in Texas. Of those, over 16,000 are unaccompanied.<sup>3</sup>
- Roughly 15-17% of Texas children have mental health disorders, but the majority of those children don't receive care.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2023, 30.3% of Texas students surveyed reported their "mental health was not good most of the time or always in the previous 30 days"<sup>5</sup>
- In 2021, 21.7% of Texas students surveyed reported they seriously considered suicide, and 12.3% attempted suicide.<sup>6</sup>
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children ages 10-14.<sup>7</sup>

Youth and young adults who have been impacted by foster care, juvenile justice, and homelessness frequently report they wish they had learned earlier in life how to support their own mental health, and wish they had earlier access to counseling to help them overcome trauma. Systems-impacted youth wish they could have spoken to their school counselor, but were often turned away because the counselor was too busy. Those who experienced homelessness acknowledge they often received little to no support in school. However, youth who did get support – even just to wash their clothes or get a few extra meals – report how impactful their supportive teacher or liaison was in their development.

## TNOYS Recommendations:

- Create a dedicated school mental health allotment that allows school districts to decide what types of interventions and supports should be made available to their students as they know their communities best.
- Increase funding available to school homeless liaisons (McKinney-Vento) so they can support students experiencing homelessness, including providing healthy foods, clean clothing, tutoring, and other essentials that will help keep students in class and learning.

1: Gaal, Susanne and Fuller, Matthew. "School Safety and Mental Health Awareness: Recommendations from K-12 Texas Public School Teachers" Journal of School Health. 2024. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josh.13425>

2: Texas Education Agency data reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), 2023-2024 School Year. <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adspr.html>

3: Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth data for 2022-2023 School year. Homelessness data is based on the McKinney Vento definition of homeless students and is data collected by the Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/2024-tehcy-infographic-22-23.pdf>

4: Whitney, Daniel & Peterson, Mark. JAMA Pediatrics, Volume 173 No. 4. US National and State Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. Figures A & B. 2019. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377?guestAccessKey=f689aa19-31f1-481d-878a-6bf83844536a#pId180045t1>

5: Texas Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 2023. <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/center-health-statistics/texas-youth-risk-behavior-surveillance-system/get-texas-yrbs-data>

6: Texas Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 2021. <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/center-health-statistics/texas-youth-risk-behavior-surveillance-system/get-texas-yrbs-data>

7: National Institute of Mental Health. Data courtesy of Center for Disease Control. Table 1. 2021. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide/>