

School Districts in Texas Prioritized Mental Health in Pandemic Planning; Fiscal Cliff Awaits with End of Federal Funding as Demand Grows

Public comment on efforts/systems allowing youth to be treated closer to home.
May 26, 2022

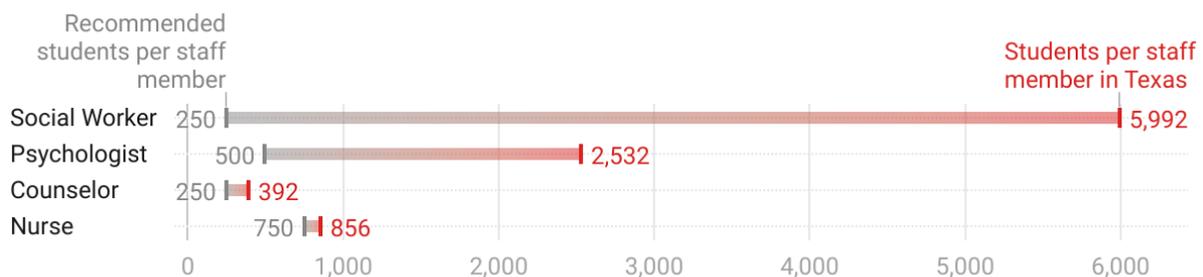
METHODOLOGY

CHILDREN AT RISK wanted to know how school districts were planning to spend federal COVID-19 relief dollars from the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) Grant. CHILDREN AT RISK researchers analyzed data from 4,642 national school districts, encompassing \$81 billion in spending and representing 72% of public K-12 student enrollment across the nation. Texas level data was from 267 public school districts and public charter school districts, representing 74% of Texas funds and 82% of Texas public school students. Data was collected between September 3, 2021 and May 17, 2022. Data provided in this report comes from Burbio.

Limitations: This data does not reflect school board-approved budgets but is instead select districts' plans for spending federal money as reported to the Texas Education Agency and subsequently the United States Department of Education.

CONTEXT

Public school students in Texas are experiencing a mental health crisis. School districts and public charter schools are struggling to respond. During the last year **73% of Texas youth with depression did not receive treatment** ([Mental Health America](#)). School-Based Health Centers increase the proportion of students who receive mental health services, but these centers are currently unevenly distributed around the state, leaving many students without access to care. The American School Counselor Association recommends 250 students per counselor, the School Social Work Association of America recommends 250 students per social worker, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends 500 students per psychologist, and the American Nurses Association recommends 750 students per nurse. **No school district in Texas has had the recommended number of providers** at any point in the past eight years ([Houston Chronicle](#)).

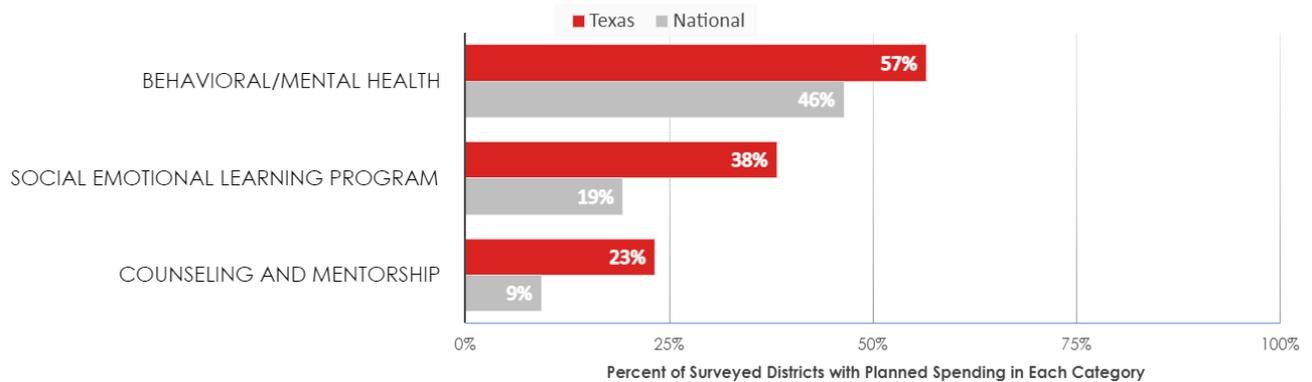


(Source: TEA 2020-2021 school year data as reported by the Houston Chronicle)

FINDINGS

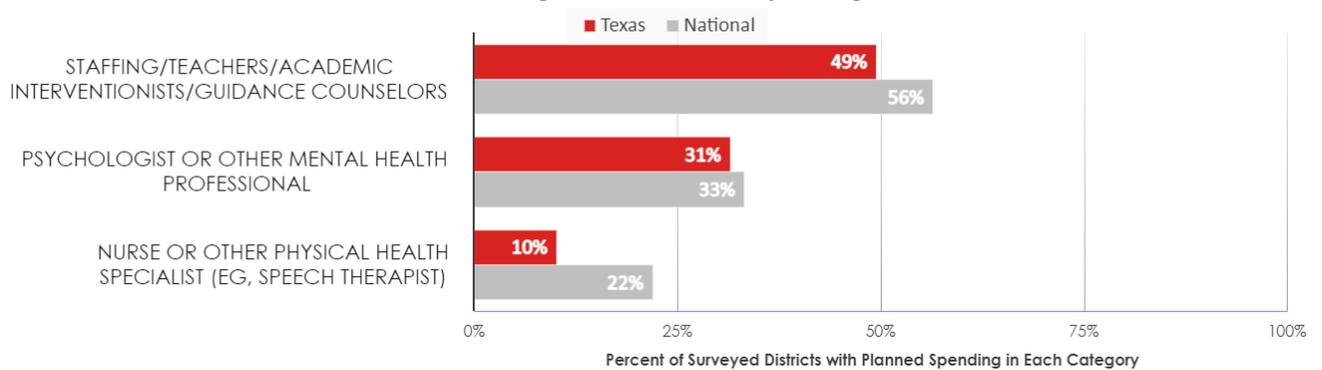
- CHILDREN AT RISK researchers found that **78% of Texas school districts plan to spend federal funds on Mental and Physical Health.**

Mental and Physical Health ESSER III Planned Spending



- Mental health professional was the second most commonly reported staffing category.

Staffing ESSER III Planned Spending



- School districts are making the mental health of their students a priority by proposing to allocate funds to provide these services. There needs to be more transparency around how these dollars are ultimately spent.
- Federal ESSER dollars will run out, leaving schools to face a fiscal cliff. **They will no longer have funding to retain mental health and other staff.**

POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

Set **required ratios** for counselors and mental health professionals per student in public schools.

Provide **long-term funding** for schools to establish school-based health centers that include mental health services.

Establish a **public centralized database** for detailed analysis of school district planned spending, approved budgets, and spent dollars.