

New Texas Research Examines How Schools Are Preparing Educators to Respond to Student Mental Health Needs

Independent review highlights opportunities to strengthen HB 3 implementation, educator preparedness, and equitable access to mental health training

HOUSTON, Texas - August 5, 2026 - As Texas schools begin a new academic year amid growing concern about youth mental health, the Hope and Healing Center & Institute (HHCI) today released an independent review of school-based mental health training programs serving Texas schools.

The research was commissioned after HHCI identified a recurring question through its work in its clinic and throughout the community with adolescents, families, and educators: **How prepared are Texas schools to help educators recognize students experiencing mental health concerns and connect them with appropriate support?**

Conducted by Gail Bray, Ph.D., Principal of Westlake Consulting, the review examined 27 school-based programs, advanced 10 for detailed comparison, and evaluated them across 25 measures of program quality, accessibility, implementation, and outcomes.

WHY THE RESEARCH MATTERS

Policy is active. Texas districts are in a phased compliance period under HB 3, with the share of applicable staff required to complete qualifying training increasing through the 2028-2029 school year.

Training quality and implementation both matter. Nine of the 10 programs reviewed align with HB 3 requirements, but programs vary in cost, delivery, evidence strength, implementation support, and documented outcomes.

Recognition must lead to support. Preparing educators is essential, but schools also need clear referral pathways and strong community partnerships so students and families can move from concern to appropriate services.

“Schools are increasingly on the front lines of the youth mental health challenge,” said Matthew S. Stanford, Ph.D., CEO of the Hope and Healing Center & Institute. “Teachers are often the first adults to notice when a student is struggling, but recognition requires preparation, confidence, and clear pathways to support. We commissioned this research to help Texas schools identify practical, evidence-informed approaches that strengthen educator readiness and improve access to care.”

WHAT THE REVIEW FOUND

- Texas has created a large, phased educator mental health training mandate through HB 3. The implementing rule identifies 10 required competencies, including warning-sign recognition, classroom and campus support, parent and guardian communication, referral knowledge, and staff wellness.
- Districts may select an evidence-informed program that documents coverage of all 10 competencies; they are not limited to one named course.
- Nine of the 10 programs evaluated in detail meet or can meet HB 3 requirements, indicating that viable options exist across the field.
- The most persistent gaps are not only program availability, but also measurable outcomes, documented reach, cross-district implementation, and the practical support schools need to sustain training over time.

Adeeb Barqawi, President & CEO of [ProUnitas](#), commented on the findings and connected them to the realities schools and families face.

“Preparing educators to recognize when a student is struggling is an important first step, but recognition alone is not enough. Schools also need systems that help staff respond quickly, coordinate support, and connect students and families to the right resources. The greatest impact comes when educator preparedness is paired with an integrated system of student support.”

ProUnitas, through its PurpleSENSE technology and coaching support, helps school districts across Texas identify and respond to student needs in a timelier and more integrated way so that every student is supported, stays in school, and graduates with purpose.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

The research recommends prioritizing clear competency documentation, expanding access to implementation tools, publishing district reach and outcome data, strengthening independent evaluation, and advancing policy pathways that allow districts to adopt high-quality training without creating new budget barriers. It also calls for stronger links between trained educators and reliable referral networks so early recognition can translate into timely support.

The review evaluated HHCI’s [Empower](#) Schools program alongside other school-based mental health literacy programs. EMPOWER Schools is free, fully virtual, and self-paced. It ranked second overall in the comparative analysis and first in the domains most closely associated with program design and school-level deployability. The full research packet provides comparative program profiles, implementation recommendations, policy analysis, and supporting materials for district decision-making.

“The findings show that Texas does not need to choose between reach and quality,” Stanford said. “The next step is to help districts identify practical options, strengthen implementation support, and build the outcome data needed to show which approaches are making a difference for educators and students.”

A BROADER COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH SERIES

The school-based review is the first in a broader series of commissioned research by the Hope and Healing Center & Institute examining how communities can strengthen access to mental health support. Additional studies explore the role of faith communities, the behavioral health workforce, and community perspectives gathered through stakeholder engagement.

ABOUT THE HOPE AND HEALING CENTER & INSTITUTE

The Hope and Healing Center & Institute is a no-cost, comprehensive mental health resource serving the Houston community and beyond. HHCI works at the intersection of clinical care, community mental health, educator training, and applied research. Through Gateway to Hope, HHCI equips individuals and organizations with practical skills and evidence-informed education to recognize, respond to, and support people experiencing mental health concerns. Learn more at www.hopeandhealingcenter.org.

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