



Report on Outcomes of the Behavioral Health Partnership Program

**As Required by
Texas Education Code,
Section 8.158(b)**

**Texas Health and Human Services
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TEXAS

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Executive Summary

Texas Education Code (TEC), Section 8.152¹ directs local mental health authorities (LMHAs) to employ a non-physician mental health professional (NPMHP). The NPMHP serves as a mental health and substance use resource for school districts located in the region served by a regional education service center (ESC) and in which the LMHA provides services. HHSC also requires local behavioral health authorities (LBHAs) to provide the same NPMHP services.

Senate Bill 26, 88th Legislature, Regular Session, 2023 amended TEC, Section 8.152(c) to allow LMHAs unable to employ an NPMHP, to request a waiver from the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to employ a licensed master social worker or a licensed professional counselor associate to fulfill the duties of an NPMHP. Since additional types of professionals can be employed to fulfill the NPMHP role, HHSC has functionally retitled the program to the Behavioral Health Partnership Program (BHPP); and the NPMHP title to BHPP liaison, to include both NPMHPs and the other professionals hired to fulfill this role under the waiver process discussed below.

HHSC contracts with 20 LMHAs and LBHAs to hire a BHPP liaison; and requires them to establish a Memorandum of Understanding with their respective ESCs. Pursuant to Section 8.158(a), LMHAs must report the outcomes for school districts and students resulting from services provided by the BHPP liaison to HHSC. HHSC also requires LBHAs to do the same. This report includes the type and number of activities conducted by the BHPP liaison, including the total number of people trained in mental health and substance use and misuse prevention. Significant findings of the 2023 HHSC annual report² include:

- 1,124: Number of mental health and substance use prevention resources shared by BHPPs, including best practices and research-based practices;
- 40,694: Number of initiatives facilitated by BHPPs addressing mental health and substance use and misuse prevention
- 985: Number of trainings provided by BHPPs on a variety of topics, including Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), grief and trauma, trauma and grief for

¹ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.8.htm>

² Data compiled from September 2022 through August 2023

children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use and misuse prevention and intervention.

1. Introduction

The goal of the BHPP is to support children’s mental health by providing education and training for ESC and school district personnel on resources and information available for addressing issues relating to mental health, trauma and grief, and substance use and misuse prevention. The BHPP achieves outcomes for districts and students by identifying and sharing resources, increasing awareness, supporting related initiatives, and building skills and effective strategies across members of the larger school community. The LMHA, LBHA, and ESCs build partnerships to support BHPP activities that leverage the LMHA’s or LBHA’s expertise in mental health and substance use disorder services, and the ESC’s expertise in supporting school districts, thereby positioning the BHPP liaison to serve as an effective resource to the ESC’s school community by providing resource information and training for school personnel, families, and children.

In fiscal year 2023, BHPP liaisons worked collaboratively with their regional ESC and served as a resource for the ESCs and school district personnel by:

- Building awareness and knowledge of mental health and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders; and
- Assisting personnel with implementing initiatives related to mental health and or substance use under state law or agency rules, the applicable Memorandum of Understanding, and related programs.

BHPP liaisons work collaboratively with their regional ESC and serve as a resource for the ESCs and school district personnel by creating awareness of:

- The list of recommended best-practice programs and research-based practices developed under TEC, Section 38.351 as referenced under Section 8.155;
- Other public and private mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery programs available in the school district, including evidenced-based programs provided by the LMHA or LBHA and other public and private mental health providers; and
- Other available public and private mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery program resources that the LMHA, LBHA, or HHSC administers to support school districts, students, and families.

BHPP liaisons also work collaboratively to facilitate monthly training opportunities on:

- Mental Health First Aid;
- The effects of grief and trauma and providing support to children with intellectual or developmental disabilities who suffer from grief or trauma; and
- Prevention and intervention programs that are effective in helping students cope with the pressure associated with alcohol, cigarettes, illegal drug use, or misuse of prescription medication.

LMHAs and LBHAs are required to submit annual reports to HHSC regarding the resources, training, community outreach provided by the BHPP liaison, and outcomes from services provided by BHPP liaisons.

HHSC compiles the information provided by LMHAs and LBHAs, produces a comprehensive report, and submits this annual report to the legislature by January 31 of each calendar year from data collected through reports from LMHAs and LBHAs. In accordance with TEC Section 8.158, HHSC also submits its annual report to the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services established under the TEC, Section 38.302.³

³ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm#38.302>

2. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to an increased need in the state for new, student-focused, mental health care strategies. One identified way to address this, is for the BHPP liaison to be responsive to the individual needs of school communities, which differ regionally.

Establishing a formal collaboration maximizes each entity's expertise in providing resources to support school personnel and school communities, ensuring the mental health and well-being of Texas children.

Examples of collaborative efforts during fiscal year 2023 include:

- HHSC allocated \$2.3 million of general revenue funds to be distributed to the employing LMHAs and LBHAs to cover the cost of a full-time employee and recovery fee to the ESC.
- The ESCs provided BHPP liaisons with workspace to carry out professional duties, increasing their opportunities for joint efforts in outreach and service delivery to school communities.

3. Program Overview

The BHPP creates opportunities to raise awareness and knowledge, as well as develop and grow skills related to mental health and substance use and misuse prevention and intervention for school districts and school communities. These services are provided through effective collaborations among LMHAs, LBHAs, and ESCs.

HHSC continued efforts to support LMHAs, LBHAs, ESCs, and BHPP liaisons by providing technical assistance and training; and creating collaboration opportunities across systems. For example, HHSC hosted regular calls for the BHPP liaisons and invited participation by the employing LMHA or LBHA, ESC leadership, and the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Table 1 below lists the LMHAs and LBHAs who employed a BHPP liaison in fiscal year 2023.⁴

Table 1. LMHA and LBHA Employers of a BHPP Liaison

No.	LMHA or LBHA	ESC Region
1	Tropical Texas Behavioral Health	1
2	Nueces Center for Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities	2
3	Gulf Bend Center	3
4	The Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	4
5	Spindletop Center	5
6	Tri-County Behavioral Healthcare	6
7	Community Healthcore	7
8	Lakes Regional Community Center	8

⁴ This required participation by the LMHA or LBHA operating primarily in the county where the specific ESC was located.

No.	LMHA or LBHA	ESC Region
9	Helen Farabee Centers	9
10	North Texas Behavioral Health Authority	10
11	My Health My Resources of Tarrant County	11
12	Heart of Texas Behavioral Health Network	12
13	Integral Care	13
14	Betty Hardwick Center	14
15	My Health My Resources Concho Valley	15
16	Texas Panhandle Centers	16
17	StarCare Specialty Health System	17
18	PermianCare	18
19	Emergence Health Network	19
20	Center for Health Care Services	20

4. Fiscal Year 2023 Program Implementation

During fiscal year 2023, 15 of the 20 contracted LMHAs and LBHAs employed a BHPP liaison. Most of those 15 BHPP liaisons worked in urban areas or communities consisting of a mix of rural and urban populations within the ESC region.

Table 2 summarizes reported BHPP liaison activities and outcomes from September 1, 2022, through August 31, 2023.

Table 2. BHPP Liaison Activities Reported During Fiscal Year 2023

Activity	Outcome
Shared mental health and substance use prevention resources	1,124 times
Number of times mental health and substance use and misuse resources shared with school districts	40,694 initiatives
Number of MHFA training events and number of community members trained	389 events 4,776 members trained
Number of training events and number of community members trained on the effect of grief and trauma	475 events 20,213 members trained
Number of training events and number of community members trained in substance use prevention and intervention	121 events 8,043 members trained
Number of school districts "impacted" by a BHPP (i.e., received BHPP resources)	944 school districts

During fiscal year 2023, BHPP liaisons:

- Established strategic working relationships with the ESCs' mental health staff to provide services to multiple school districts within their respective regions;
- Provided outreach programs and training to school communities and presented to various audiences, highlighting their successful partnerships with schools and the benefits of BHPP activities while emphasizing the importance of mental health and school collaboration and the benefits of early intervention for children;
- Disseminated monthly newsletters to school personnel to provide information about mental health resources;
- Distributed resource information to communities affected by disaster or traumatic events;
- Coordinated with TEA and ESCs regarding their school resource rubric⁵ to enhance the inventory of state and regional mental health resources available to schools;
- Presented to other BHPP liaison peers creating a learning collaborative;
- Participated in or presented at counselor conferences, school safety summits, and community resource symposiums; and
- Supported school districts and local communities after local disasters (e.g., Uvalde School District, Perrytown tornado) and crisis (e.g. opioids).

BHPP continues to establish relationships and provide services to the school districts that they serve. Some successes of note for BHPP in fiscal year 2023 include:

- Trained over 2,000 people on trauma and grief within the first two months of the fiscal year;
- Presented at the "Stronger Together: Navigating Mental Health Systems" conference, attended by over 400 school resource officers, on LMHA or LBHA resources, collaborating with their LMHA or LBHA, and providing trauma-informed support to students;
- Distributed Narcan and education on Narcan at Tipping the Pain Scale Event, reaching over 462 students; and
- Used their expertise to identify resources for a statewide and regional mental health resource inventory database⁶ built in collaboration with TEA for Texas schools.

⁵ TEC, Sections 38.251 through 38.254

⁶ <https://schoolmentalhealthtxdatabase.org/>

The BHPP faced barriers during program implementation, including retention challenges for certain LMHAs and LBHAs. Three LMHAs were unsuccessful in hiring or retaining a BHPP in fiscal year 2023 due to significant workforce shortages.

To address hiring challenges, HHSC offered individualized support to the LMHAs and LBHAs affected by extreme workforce shortages in their areas. The LMHAs and LBHAs that experienced hiring challenges tried multiple recruitment efforts, such as increasing salaries, reposting the position multiple times, and intensifying and expanding their recruitment efforts. The lack of flexibility in the licensure requirements of the BHPP Liaison was a key barrier prior to the 88th Legislative Session. The 88th Legislature enacted Senate Bill 26 which amended TEC 8.152(c) by expanding the types of qualifications that meet BHPP qualification requirements. The amendments allow licensed master social worker or a licensed professional counselor associate to serve as a BHPP if an NPMHP cannot be hired and with HHSC approval. With the implementation of Senate Bill 26, there is an improved opportunity to hire BHPP liaisons in locations with significant workforce shortages to provide services going forward.

5. Conclusion

The BHPP creates opportunities to raise awareness, increase knowledge, and build skills related to mental health, substance use and misuse prevention, and intervention for school districts and school communities through effective collaborations among LMHAs, LBHAs, and ESCs.

The BHPP liaisons work with their local school districts to build relationships by sharing information, supporting initiatives, and providing necessary trainings to address the local community's needs. In fiscal year 2023, LMHAs, LBHAs, ESCs, and BHPP liaisons continued their efforts to establish working relationships and provide rapid implementation of trainings and outreach.

HHSC will continue supporting BHPP liaisons as they provide services to improve the safety, mental health, and substance use needs of school communities which remain a priority for Texas. The continued partnerships among LMHAs, LBHAs, ESCs, local school districts, TEA, and HHSC will provide ongoing support to build the knowledge and skills to maintain strong, supportive schools and local communities across Texas.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
BHPP	Behavioral Health Partnership Program
ESC	Education Service Center
HHSC	Health and Human Services Commission
LMHA	Local Mental Health Authority
LBHA	Local Behavioral Health Authority
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
NPMHP	Non-Physician Mental Health Professional
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TEC	Texas Education Code