



JB Pritzker, Governor

Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary

DATE: June 16, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader

FROM: Dulce M. Quintero *Dulce Quintero*
Secretary *by [signature]*
Illinois Department of Human Services

SUBJECT: **Report on Technical Assistance for Mental Health Resources in Schools**

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the Report on Technical Assistance for Mental Health Resources in Schools on behalf of the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in 20 ILCS 1705/76.2.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Lisa Betz, Deputy Director of Child & Adolescent Services, at Lisa.J.Betz@illinois.gov.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center

Report on the Implementation of 20 ILCS 1705/76.2: Technical Assistance for Mental Health Resources in Schools

Prepared by
Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery

in partnership with
Illinois State Board of Education

July 1, 2025

I. Introduction

Pursuant to 20 ILCS 1705/76.2, this report outlines the efforts of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR), and the former Division of Mental Health (DMH), in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), to provide technical assistance for the provision of mental health care during school days. The primary goal of this initiative is to increase the availability and accessibility of mental health resources for students across Illinois schools.

II. Strategic Objectives

The following key objectives have guided IDHS' work in the implementation of this section:

1. **Expand mental health access** during school hours.
2. **Provide technical assistance and training** to school staff and mental health professionals.
3. **Establish standardized practices and protocols** for mental health care in school settings.
4. **Foster inter-agency collaboration** to ensure sustainable, community-based mental health supports.
5. **Promote equity and inclusion** in mental health access for all students.

III. Activities and Implementation to Date

- Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) is a grant program of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) focused on improving school-based mental health services and supports for students. It aims to increase awareness of mental health issues, provide training to school personnel, and connect students and families with needed services. DBHR collaborates with ISBE and multiple school districts and agencies to implement Project AWARE in Illinois schools. This includes ISBE Project AWARE Grant 2020-2024; ISBE Project AWARE Grant 2022-2026; Egyptian Health Department Project AWARE Grant 2023-2028; and Chicago Public Schools Project AWARE Grant 2022-2027. DBHR provides technical assistance and support to Grantees, including assistance in implementing best practices, offering training, and providing assistance with compliance, reporting, and data collection requirements. DBHR has also assisted in the development of workforce by promoting Certified Recovery Support Specialist (CRSS) to consumers in Project AWARE schools. DBHR also assists in integrating Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and by assisting Project AWARE grantees in the development of policies for sustainable school mental health systems. DBHR also distributed materials, curriculum guidance, and other tools that align with the goals of Project AWARE.
- DBHR has also developed and disseminated communications materials and printed resources highlighting mental health services available to Illinois students and their families. These materials include, but are not limited to, information on services provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Office of Recovery and Support, and the First.IL initiative.
- FIRST.IL is an evidence-based treatment model of coordinated specialty care for individuals between the ages of 14-40 who have experienced their first episode of psychosis within the last 18 months. Eligible diagnoses for FIRST.IL include schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, schizophreniform disorder, other specified/unspecified schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorder, bipolar disorder with psychotic features, major depressive disorder with psychotic features, and PTSD with dissociative symptoms. FIRST.IL employs a collaborative approach, offering services such as psychiatric care, individual resiliency training with a therapist specializing in cognitive behavioral therapy for psychosis (CBTP), family psychoeducation and support, individual placement and support for employment or education, substance use counseling, and community support. Presently, 20 providers are operating 22 FIRST.IL sites throughout Illinois, each of which engages in educational outreach to local communities, including schools, behavioral health hospitals, youth centers, and other facilities, to effectively reach the target population. Further details regarding FIRST.IL locations can be found at: [IDHS: First Episode Psychosis \(FEP\)](#)
- The Illinois School Mental Health Database is a publicly accessible, interactive tool developed by DBHR to support the expansion and coordination of school-based mental health services across the state. Available on the [IDHS website](#), the database provides detailed information on current mental health initiatives, as well as resources for educators, parents, school staff, and students. By promoting transparency and

accessibility, the Illinois School Mental Health Database advances the State's goals of increasing the availability, coordination, and effectiveness of mental health care for students during the school day.

- DBHR, in collaboration with ISBE, is actively developing training modules focused on mental health topics relevant to school environments and classroom settings. These trainings aim to equip educators and school personnel with knowledge and strategies to effectively recognize and respond to common mental health challenges experienced by school-aged children, including issues related to executive functioning, anxiety, and resilience.

The initiative supports the broader implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) across Illinois schools and seeks to enhance the capacity of school staff to foster supportive and responsive educational environments. Additionally, these professional development opportunities will offer Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs) for participating educators. DBHR has also developed a mental health group counseling curriculum designed for use by school-based mental health professionals. The group session topics align with those being concurrently developed for educators, ensuring consistency in addressing the mental health needs of students across educational settings.

- IDHS/DBHR secured a grant from SAMHSA to plan and execute the 988 Lifeline in Illinois. This initiative established a 24/7, free, and confidential resource for individuals experiencing mental health crises, including students. DBHR has developed comprehensive planning resources and toolkits to facilitate integrating 988 services statewide. The implementation of 988 has significantly and positively impacted students by providing immediate access to mental health support. Schools have been encouraged to promote awareness of the 988 Lifeline through various means, such as displaying posters and distributing materials that highlight the 988 number, incorporating 988 information into student ID cards to ensure easy access to crisis support, and utilizing social media platforms to disseminate information about the Lifeline.
- DBHR publishes a monthly Wellness Brief, distributed to subscribers, highlighting mental health awareness topics relevant to that month. Each edition includes educational content and curated resources tailored for educators, parents, and residents of Illinois.
- The Illinois Individual Placement and Support for Emerging Adults and Transitional Age Youth is a DBHR initiative to enhance employment opportunities for young individuals with serious mental health conditions. IPS focuses on implementing the evidence-based Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, which integrates employment services with mental health treatment. This model is tailored to assist emerging adults and transitional age youth (typically ages 16–25) in securing and maintaining competitive employment, thereby supporting their recovery and independence.

- The BEACON Portal, which launched to schools in October 2024 and to the public in January 2025, is a new centralized resource for Illinois youth and families seeking services for behavioral health needs. Through this resource, school personnel can enter information regarding the behavioral health needs of a youth/family and receive a list of community-based services that might meet the need. It also searches 22 State-funded programs that the youth might also be eligible for. This information can be shared with the family. Schools can also provide the online site information directly to families for them to enter the information directly. Once the individual enters the information and receives their results, they are asked if they need assistance accessing the resources provided. If they do, they can make that request, and the Resource Coordinator can then work with the family to link to community-based resources. If the more intense resources are needed or access to residential placement, then a clinical specialist can be assigned to assist.

BEACON Clinical Specialists can help a school's placement liaison/team in identifying an appropriate residential treatment facility; troubleshooting cases where behavior or medical/mental health diagnosis are barriers to placement, linking behaviors as symptoms to increase the likelihood of acceptance. The BEACON team can also help the school team identify appropriate funding options for services that are needed by their students and families. ISBE is a partner to BEACON as they are a part of our intra-agency team. Together, both BEACON and ISBE attend our weekly intra-agency crisis staffing calls. ISBE assists BEACON by connecting us with school districts, confirming school district enrollment, identifying if a youth has an IEP, confirming placement recommendations in the IEP, and/or sharing percentage of time in special education; all of which help us narrow down appropriate placement options.

- DBHR serves as a key member of the Community and Residential Services Authority (CRSA), a legislatively-established interagency board dedicated to addressing systemic barriers that hinder youth with severe emotional and behavioral challenges from accessing appropriate services. As one of nine State agencies represented on the CRSA board, DBHR contributes its expertise in mental health to policy development, resource coordination, and dispute resolution. Through its active participation on the CRSA board, DBHR plays a vital role in shaping a coordinated, interagency approach to support the mental health and educational success of Illinois youth.

IV. Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- **Workforce shortages in school-based mental health professionals.** DBHR promotes CRSS and CRSS to Success Programs to consumers in effort to increase the workforce of mental health workers in local communities. Additionally, DBHR brings awareness to the Community Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program for those interested in becoming a mental healthcare worker. This is an effort to retain clinicians in Illinois.

- **Varying levels of school readiness to adopt new practices.** DBHR acknowledges that districts differ in capacity and DBHR, in collaboration with ISBE, support a phased approach to implementing universal mental health screening. This strategy allows districts to progress at a pace aligned with their resources and readiness levels. DBHR also has made efforts to provide trainings and SEL lesson plans that are adaptable to different school climates to ensure the entirety of Illinois schools have access to reliable resources. DBHR continues to develop these resources to meet the needs of school-aged children.
- **Funding constraints for long-term implementation.** DBHR continues to search for Grant Funded opportunities to expand mental health services and resources to Illinois Schools. DBHR hopes to support schools in their initiatives to embed mental health professionals and resources in schools, promoting early intervention and reducing long-term disparities. DBHR recognizes addressing mental health disparities requires a coordinated approach, including supporting legislation addressing mental health parity in schools. These efforts will ensure that all students, regardless of circumstances, have equitable access to mental health care and support they need to thrive academically and personally.

Opportunities

- **Increased public and legislative interest in youth mental health.** DBHR recognizes the need for youth voices and is interested in connecting with youth organizations, such as Active Minds, for collaboration and input. DBHR hopes to incorporate youth voices in informational sessions for legislators, clinicians, youth, and families.
- **Federal funding and grants to support school mental health initiatives.** DBHR continues to search for funding opportunities to implement SEL education in schools.
- **Potential to integrate mental health into broader educational equity efforts.** DBHR may assist ISBE in efforts to train educators and school staff on recognizing mental health issues in the context of systemic inequities, aligning mental health initiatives with ISBE's SEL standards and trauma-responsive practices.

V. Next Steps

- DBHR and ISBE will finalize and disseminate statewide mental health resource standards by Fall 2025.
- DBHR and ISBE will expand technical assistance to all Illinois school districts by the 2025–2026 school year.

VI. Conclusion

DBHR and ISBE are committed to building a comprehensive, accessible mental health infrastructure within Illinois schools. Through strategic technical assistance and interagency collaboration, we are making significant strides toward ensuring every student has access to timely and effective mental health support.