

Identifying and Treating Behavioral Health in Houston's Children and Youth

Houston Endowment supports the launch of The Center for School Behavioral Health

Houston Endowment maintains a strong focus on strengthening pathways to success for children and youth to ensure they are on track to become productive, fully-engaged adults. We know that to realize our vision of a vibrant Houston we must address our community's most pressing challenges and remove barriers to opportunity for those in our communities who are most in need. Among our most critical challenges is the incidence of mental and behavioral health issues among young people. The National Institute of Mental Health reports the onset of half of all mental illnesses occurs by age 14, and according to the Texas Education Agency, just one percent of students in Texas public schools with mental health concerns receive special services to address their needs.

In February, 2016, Houston Endowment approved \$2.07 million in a grant to **Mental Health America of Greater Houston** (MHA Houston) as part of the Foundation's priority to enhance access to primary and preventive care in greater Houston, especially for children. The grant will support the launch of **The Center for School Behavioral Health** (The Center), an innovative approach intended to facilitate the implementation of effective policies and practices within school districts and child-serving agencies that will improve the prevention, early identification and treatment of behavioral health issues among children. Houston Endowment Senior Program Officer Elizabeth Love noted, "The Center for School Behavioral Health has strong potential to drive meaningful, systems-level change that benefits some of our most vulnerable children, and to do so in an innovative and collaborative way."

The Center is an expansion of Mental Health America's **School Behavioral Health Initiative**, a coalition of over 50 entities in greater Houston including school districts, behavioral health providers and child-serving agencies. The coalition, formed in 2012, has developed recommendations focused on improving the policies, funding and systems that influence how schools approach behavioral health among students. The initiative has thus far resulted in numerous state legislative changes and the adoption of programs by several area school districts focused on training for educators on recognizing and responding to behavioral health issues.

The Center for School Behavioral Health will expand upon this work, providing incentive grants and technical assistance to school districts piloting systems-level change initiatives; launching a social media campaign intended to reduce the stigma of children's behavioral health issues; coordinating learning communities and hosting an annual state-wide conference; and monitoring implementation of local initiatives and evaluating their impact. "Our schools are a crucial locus for effective behavioral health interventions," said Susan Fordice, president and CEO of Mental Health America of Greater Houston. "Through The Center, we look forward to collaboratively developing, enhancing, or expanding systems to help improve behavioral health outcomes for all students."

On March 22, 2016, MHA Houston held a press conference announcing the launch of The Center. Houston Public Media recently aired a story about the launch and Houston Endowment's support; click [here](#) to listen to or read a transcript of the segment. A link to the MHA Houston press release can be found [here](#).