



UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON  
PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES  
School of Medicine

## 2025 Washington State Legislative Priorities

### University of Washington School Mental Health Assessment, Research, and Training (SMART) Center

The mission of the UW SMART Center is to improve the well-being of all students through provision of effective, accessible, culturally responsive school mental health programming. In advance of each year's legislative session, the UW SMART Center recommends policy, funding, and legislative action that holds promise to advance this mission in its home state of Washington.

Below we list several policy and funding priorities related to school-based behavioral health (SBBH) for the 2025 legislative session. These are far from comprehensive; however, they extend from priorities recently identified by legislators as well as entities such as the Washington State Auditor. Recommendations also align with priorities advanced by advisory groups such as the School Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention Subcommittee of the legislative Child, Youth, and Family Behavioral Health Work Group, and the Washington Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee.

#### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Establish and resource a Washington State lead agency for school-based behavioral health<sup>1</sup>.**  
Among other activities, this entity will:
  - Develop and oversee implementation of a **shared framework** for coordinated student behavioral health supports;
  - Define **minimum expectations** for establishing a comprehensive set of behavioral health supports;
  - Establish **strategic direction and goals** for state-wide programming to strengthen the capacity of schools to implement supports and reduce system barriers; and
  - Oversee continual, **data-informed monitoring** of progress toward strategic goals statewide and local quality of SBBH, and student outcomes over time.
- 2. Establish and fund an entity Technical Assistance & Training Network (TATN) to provide schools with the support, resources, and training necessary to coordinate comprehensive supports across the behavioral health continuum for their students<sup>1</sup>.** Elements of the TATN to be resourced should include:
  - **A coordinating hub** that includes the state lead agency and a contracted

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<sup>1</sup> The first two recommendations were the highest priorities for 2025 of the School Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention Subcommittee of the Children, Youth, and Families Behavioral Health Work Group.

- organization(s) with relevant infrastructure and expertise in SBBH training and TA;
  - **A statewide & regional network of partners** with experience and capacity on specific topics on which local education agencies (LEAs) need training and TA;
  - **Specialized trainings and certificate programs** for the SBBH workforce, including established Education Staff Associates (ESAs) such as school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, as well as other roles such as Student Assistance Professionals (SAPs); and
  - **A small grant program for LEAs** to obtain training and TA from the Network (in addition to other local and federal resources) to achieve high quality SBBH as per the shared state SBBH framework.
3. **Support the stability, skills, and diversity of the school-based behavioral health workforce** through several interconnected priorities:
- **Provide conditional scholarships and advanced skills training** to increase the number, skill, and diversity of key SBBH professionals, such as school social workers, psychologists and counselors<sup>1</sup>;
  - **Increase local funding for school SBBH** through increases to the prototypical funding model focusing on school social workers<sup>2</sup>;
  - **Provide targeted grants to hire SBBH practitioners in low-resource communities**, focusing on school social workers in rural areas;
  - **Support skill development of the SBBH workforce** via the statewide Technical Assistance and Training Network (see recommendation 2) and other entities; and
  - **Invest in Behavioral Health Student Assistance Professionals (BH-SAP) statewide** by restoring funding to the 60-plus BH-SAP program<sup>3</sup>.
4. **Promote best practices in universal behavioral health screening in schools within the Washington MTSS Framework.** Build on the statewide landscape assessment for universal school-based behavioral health screening and its subsequent recommendations by:
- **Updating Legislation** such as RCW 28A.320.127 and RCW 28A.320.1271 to reflect best practices in screening for behavioral health in schools;
  - **Building statewide capacity and support for implementation of effective universal BH screening**, such as via the statewide Technical Assistance and Training Network (see recommendation 2 above) and/or other entities with relevant expertise; and
  - **Funding and supporting an initial set of demonstration sites** (e.g., LEAs and ESDs selected for readiness and geographic/student demographic diversity) to implement or improve existing universal screening.

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<sup>2</sup> Priority being advanced through the Workforce & Rates subcommittee of the Children, Youth, and Families Behavioral Health Work Group.

<sup>3</sup> Priority being advanced via a 2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package submitted by the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI).