

Some AISD schools may lose on-campus licensed mental health experts

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AUSTIN (KXAN) — The clock is ticking for nearly 700 Austin ISD students receiving mental health counseling at more than a dozen different schools.

A recent change to how the federal government processes health care waivers has led to AISD and Seton scaling back on-campus mental health services at 16 schools on 14 campuses.

"The 1115 Medicaid waiver is very complex," said Ellen Richards, the chief strategy officer for Integral Care. "It went from what I would call a program based waiver, where we had specific programs we were implementing to a system waiver that requires us to look at all the people served in our system and meet specific metrics for our entire service system."

AISD's director of Health Services, Tracy Spinner, explained in an email to KXAN, "Seton, as the Performing Provider, elected to not submit a 1115 Waiver 2.0 project because the federal requirements changed."

The schools affected include:

- Austin High School
- Bedicheck Middle School
- Burnet Middle School
- Dobie Middle School
- Eastside Memorial Early College High School
- Fulmore Middle School
- Garcia YMLA
- Lanier Early College High School
- LBJ/LASA
- Martin Middle School
- McCallum High School
- Reagan Early College High School
- Sadler Means YWLA
- Travis Early College High School

According to AISD, \$1,760,003 is needed to continue services at the campuses at a similar level and at the same campuses.

"The district has identified \$400,000 from Title IV funding," Spinner said. "In addition, Integral Care has requested fiscal support from Central Health. Dependent upon the total available funding, Integral Care will also provide funding commensurate to the amount available in insurance reimbursement they will be able to receive."

Integral Care has also agreed to maintain the same level of counseling services through Sept. 30, but the district still needs about \$640,000 to continue the services beyond September.

"We have been in the schools for several years now, working with the students, faculty and families," said Richards. "Many of them come into the school system having experienced

trauma, or very serious issues from their families, or from their communities. Our interest is to really get in there and provide mental health supports they need in order to be productive in schools."

"It was shocking to me when I heard that they wanted to scale back because there's already not enough. They need to be growing it," said Sloan Dudley.

Dudley graduated from Austin High School a couple of months ago.

She told KXAN she was referred to an on-campus therapist during her freshman year. "I was experiencing a lot of depressive moods. I had some self-harming behaviors," said Dudley.

She went on to explain, "It was access that I really didn't have. My parents are divorced. They lived in different places. The only time I was consistently in one place was school. It really gave me access that I otherwise wouldn't have had to therapy."

AISD said other schools with on-campus therapy help aren't affected by the 1115 Waiver change because they're funded under "other funding streams."

A Seton spokesperson said in a statement, "We are committed to delivering comprehensive healthcare solutions for children in the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Our approach is to continue collaborating with community partners to ensure mental health services are delivered for students. We look forward to building upon our 22-year partnership with AISD, while providing exemplary care and value to our children and families."