



# South Central Mental Health Counseling Center

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## Testimony to House K-12 Budget Committee on HB 2582

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, I am Dr. Dan Rice, Executive Director of South Central Mental Health (SCMH), a community mental health center providing services in Butler County and the surrounding areas. I am here to speak about HB 2582 related to the mental health in schools initiative. Butler County encompasses 9 school districts of which 2 were chosen to participate in the mental health in schools initiative for the current school year. These districts are in Augusta and El Dorado. We have clinicians, case managers and attendant care staff serving 12 different buildings across elementary, middle and high schools between the two districts.

While we have served the children in all of our school districts for years, including services within the schools, there is no doubt that this project has resulted in better care for children.

### 1. Access to services has increased.

- The number of children being referred for services has increased in the districts involved in the project. In the past, many children encouraged to seek services were never seen for treatment. Parent work schedules often narrowed the window for available appointment times to between 5-7PM. Likewise, transportation to one of our clinics was a barrier for some parents. Finally, it is suspected that the stigma of seeking mental health treatment may have hindered some parents from following through with services.
- We have been able to provide more intensive and consistent care to those most in need. Our “no show” rate for these children averaged about 60% and our utilization data showed that they were receiving only about 25% of recommended services. “No shows” are due to the same barriers as listed above.
- We are able to provide prevention or tertiary services to children that otherwise may have not been seen until their symptoms were more severe. Mental health staff availability to school personnel allowed for more conversation regarding teacher concerns and screens by mental health staff that can result in brief check-ins with the child or a referral to a psycho-educational group that addresses their need

## 2. Improved partnership with the schools which results in better quality of care for the children.

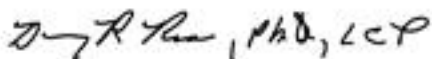
- Communication between school staff and our CMHC has improved because of daily face to face interaction instead of back and forth e-mails or phone messages.
- We are able to provide education to school staff regarding mental health issues. While school staff in both districts have attended trauma training, it is easy to lose sight of that training without ongoing support.
- Teachers that were initially skeptical of services in the school and particularly resistant to children being removed from their classroom for therapy are now our biggest advocates and source of referrals.
- Teachers are reporting gratitude to our staff that they can put their full energy into teaching without having to attend to the behavioral or emotional difficulties of their students.
- There is improved understanding of mental health services by school staff, parents and the children that we serve. Children are asking about services for their peers.

## 3. Improved Outcomes

- While this project started just 4 months ago, we have already seen improvements in school attendance and grades.
- An increase number of children experiencing suicidal ideation have been identified. While the vast majority of these children would not have planned or followed through with an attempt, the identification of these children allowed our staff to address issues before they became more unmanageable.
- We have been able to provide an array of psycho-educational groups in addition to traditional therapies in order to meet the need of each child.

Our goal in each of our schools is to help create a positive climate in which children can thrive both academically and socially. We are continuing to grow capacity within Augusta and El Dorado and are gearing up preparations to provide programming for other school districts that are now asking for support.

It is hard to imagine a better use of tax dollars than the mental health in schools initiative.



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South Central Mental Health