

HB 268:

GEORGIA'S STEPS TOWARD IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE, SCHOOL SAFETY, AND STUDENT WELLBEING



School safety and school climate are top priorities of state leadership this year following the mass casualty incident at Apalachee High School in Winder, Ga., in September 2024. Following this incident, Georgia lawmakers expressed commitment to preventing further tragedies by improving safety in schools and ensuring student well-being. Several bills related to addressing school safety and improving mental health in schools were introduced during the 2025 legislative session.

The largest of these bills was **HB 268**, a comprehensive bill aimed at ensuring school safety primarily by increasing mental health services in schools and improving student data tracking. This bill was signed into law by Gov. Brian P. Kemp in April 2025. The General Assembly also **appropriated** funding for state fiscal year 2026 to implement the items in this bill, including \$108 million to provide grants to schools to support school security needs and to provide for student mental health support and \$19.6 million to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to establish student mental health support grants. There are also several appropriations for specific line items.

- **40.68% of Georgia middle and high school students surveyed in 2022 reported anxiety or fear disrupting their daily lives within the past 30 days.**
- **73,000 students reported seriously considering self-harm in the past year.**
- **46% of Georgia children needing mental health services struggle to access care, meaning nearly half of the 515,491 children (aged 3-17) seeking help may go without essential support.**

Source: [School-Based Behavioral Health Collaborative](#) (2025)

- **4 in 5 children (aged 6-17) with mental health challenges receive no treatment.**
- **Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people (aged 5-24).**
- **1 in 10 children has a mental health condition that impairs daily functioning.**
- **1 in 4 high school students reports feelings of depression.**
- **Elementary students with mental health needs are 3 times more likely to face suspension or expulsion.**

Source: [Georgia HOPE](#) (2025)

HB 268 is critical to Georgia's behavioral health system of care because it directs the state to prioritize services across all levels of the continuum of care, recognizing schools as an access point for many children and families. The bill includes prevention services such as Tier 1 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and violence and suicide prevention training. The bill is also unprecedented in its requirement for school safety plans to address behavioral health needs and include a behavioral threat assessment, an evidence-based plan to identify and mitigate potential threats.

HB 268 addresses several of Mindworks' 2024-2026 priority objectives, including increasing awareness of and counteracting stigma around mental health challenges and advancing expanded roles of child-serving state agencies in prevention and early intervention. HB 268 also designates DBHDD as the

primary resource for mental health guidance with the support of the Department of Education (DOE). This is significant because it reinforces DBHDD as the state's authority on mental health and directs school boards to leverage their partnership in implementing mental health services into schools.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN HB 268?

HB 268 is a comprehensive bill to provide for the safety, health, and well-being of students and school communities. The following highlights and summarizes components of the bill grouped by key topic areas.



PANIC ALERT SYSTEMS

- Ricky and Alyssa's Law: Requires public schools to implement a mobile panic alert system that will enhance emergency response by ensuring coordination of first responders and law enforcement (Section 1-1).
- Requires public schools to secure school mapping data that is compatible with law enforcement agencies' software capabilities. This will allow first responders to have access to the school layout prior to entering the building (Section 1-2, 1-3).

THERE IS ABOUT \$108 MILLION ALLOCATED IN THE FY 26 BUDGET, OR ABOUT \$61,000 PER SCHOOL, TO IMPLEMENT THE ABOVE.



EDUCATION ASSURANCE

- Ensures children in state custody can enroll in local public schools and receive appropriate free education, including special education services. This ensures that students in foster care, juvenile justice placements, or psychiatric residential treatment facilities can receive local public education (Section 2-1).
- Creates procedures for following up with students who stop attending school without notice after 30 consecutive days. Refers to the Division of Family & Children Services to conduct assessments to determine if the absence/withdrawal was to avoid education. Refers to RESAs to follow up and determine if the student has been enrolled elsewhere. Clarifies that this requirement does not prohibit schools from attempts to determine the whereabouts of the student (Section 2-16).





MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

- Provides grants to local school systems to reimburse for one or more qualified student advocacy specialists. Student advocacy specialists will identify and facilitate interventions for students who have mental health concerns (Section 2-2).
- Encourages high-needs schools to implement Tier 1 and Tier 2 PBIS with lessons approved by DBHDD, and response to intervention (RTI) programs, in their schools. Requires that 95% of school personnel receive student behavioral health awareness training approved by DBHDD. Authorizes the State Board of Education to fund such programs (Section 2-12).
- Requires all public school staff and students to receive training in youth violence and suicide awareness and prevention to be facilitated by DOE or DBHDD. Requires schools to adopt policies, in consultation with stakeholders, that address suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Requires schools to have a student-led, staff-advised violence prevention club open to all students. Requires schools to implement a 24/7 anonymous reporting system for any person to report potentially threatening activity. Clarifies that this section does not create a legal duty of care for schools (Section 2-15).
- Requires that school safety plans address the behavioral health needs of all school personnel with guidance from DBHDD and develop a behavioral health threat assessment plan that will be submitted to DBHDD. Directs the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS) to coordinate with DBHDD and DOE to assist with the development and implementation of behavioral threat assessment plans (Section 2-19, 2-20).
- Requires GEMA to establish an emergency response system for public schools to communicate with local school systems about active threats. Requires GEMA to establish a statewide alert system for designated personnel at public schools to report threats to campus safety. Creates procedures for following up with parents and guardians about behavioral health services when a student is added to the alert system (Section 2-21).

THERE IS ABOUT \$7 MILLION ALLOCATED IN THE BUDGET FOR THIS REIMBURSEMENT.

THERE IS AN ADDITIONAL \$3 MILLION ADDED TO SUPPORT THESE PROGRAMS.



JUVENILE COURTS AND CORRECTIONS

- Revises the definition of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon in the juvenile code (Section 3-1).
- Gives the Superior Court jurisdiction when a child aged 13-17 has committed aggravated assault with a firearm, among other violent crimes. Provides definitions for firearm (Section 3-2).
- Clarifies what is considered disruptive to or interfering with public schools, and requires boards of education to develop disciplinary procedures. Creates and defines the offense of terroristic threat and classifies it as a felony offense (Section 3-4, 3-5).



STUDENT RECORDS AND DATA SHARING

- Authorizes regional education service agencies (RESAs) to provide dispute-resolution services to schools located in their service area (Section 2-3, 2-4).
- Defines the role of a chief privacy officer, who provides guidance to RESAs, local education agencies, public schools, and state agencies on the laws surrounding student privacy to improve coordination of data sharing while following privacy laws (Section 2-6).
- Ensures that parents and guardians can receive access to their student's records upon request (Section 2-7).
- Requires that schools receive complete records of transferring students including academic, attendance, and disciplinary records. Requires parents of students above third grade to disclose critical information to the transferring school related to the student's behavioral history (Section 2-8).
- Allows schools to inform teachers if a student assigned to them has a criminal history (Section 2-9).
- Requires any law enforcement officer who has an encounter with a school-age youth to report this encounter to a school official where the child is enrolled within five days. Provides definitions for school age youth and official encounter (Section 2-10).
- Denies local boards of education from having policies that deny or prevent parents from reviewing their student's education records (Section 2-11).
- Ensures that school disciplinary hearings and records are kept confidential while requiring a nonidentifying public summary of incidents and outcomes (Section 2-13).
- Provides proceedings for parents who do not cooperate with school interventions or fail to release student's education records. Allows courts to fine parents up to \$500 for failure to comply with the court (Section 2-14).
- Requires school boards to have a policy that promotes parental involvement in public schools. Included in this policy should be procedures for parents to review their student's records; learn about the student's curriculum — and object to certain instructional materials if needed; withdraw their student from sex education classes; consent or not consent to photo, video, and voice recordings for their student; and receive records requested in a timely manner (Section 2-17).
- Requires boards of education to have a written agreement establishing the role that law enforcement officers will play related to the handling of and disclosure of student data (Section 2-18).