



Annual AWARE Report

January 2025

Year 1 - Year 3



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Overview of Project AWARE

Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) Texas aims to strengthen community and school-based supports for the mental health, wellness, and resiliency of students. Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), AWARE is a collaboration between the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health (TIEMH), Education Service Center 13 (ESC), and three Texas local education agencies (LEAs).

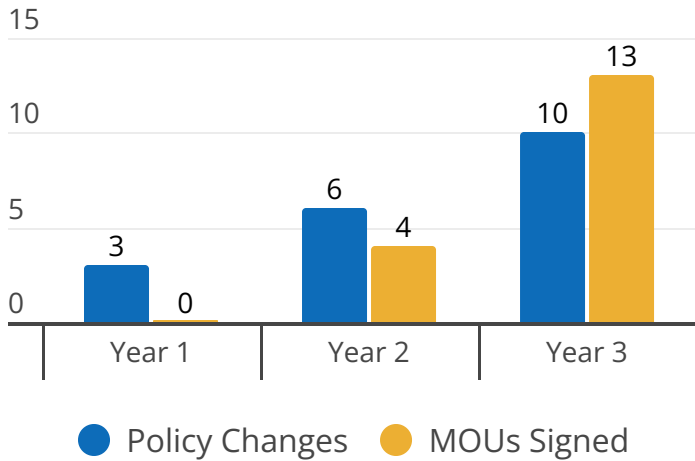
Project AWARE is guided by four goals, which include:

1. Increase and improve access to culturally competent and developmentally appropriate school and community-based mental health services.
2. Increase awareness and identification of mental health issues among all adults working with young people and promote positive mental health for students, families, school staff, and the community.
3. Help students develop skills that will promote resilience, self-regulation and pro-social behaviors, avert the development of mental and behavioral health disorders and prevent youth violence.
4. Develop an infrastructure and capacity to sustain access to mental health promotion and evidence-based practices for school and community-based services.

The AWARE program has made significant strides in improving delivery of mental health services and support in Texas schools as a result of the dedicated efforts of school staff, mental health professionals, and community partners. With so much progress already made, the AWARE program will continue to sustain this momentum and support student mental health and well-being.

Strengthening Systems Through Training, Policies, and MOUs

District Policy Changes & MOUs Signed



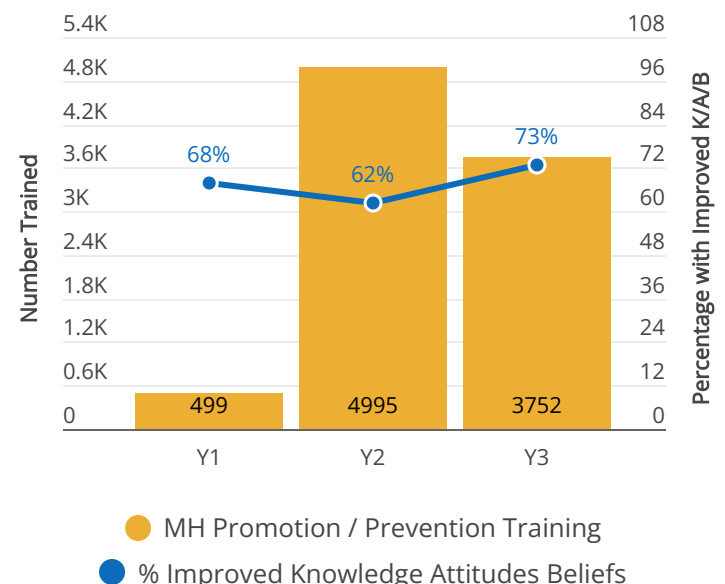
AWARE LEA staff continue to work to create mental health policy changes and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with community partners to improve student mental health. Year 1 started with 3 policy changes and 0 MOUs signed; however, as the grant progressed into Year 2 and 3, the number of MOUs and policy changes increased each year. Some of the policy changes include documenting procedures for the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), universal screening and crisis response protocols.

★ District Spotlight ★

Manor ISD has excelled in building community partnerships! Key partners include Goodwill Central Texas for life skills and employment training, Sana Yoga for trauma-informed mindfulness, the Austin Center for Grief and Loss for grief support, and the Cook Center for free online mental health resources. These collaborations focus on supporting students' mental health, self-regulation, and overall growth.

AWARE grant funds have enabled mental health trainings for school counselors and other mental health professionals (e.g., LPC, LCSW), as well as educators and community members. Across the first three years, 9,246 people received mental health training as a result of the grant. Trainees were asked to complete a self-report evaluation survey to measure improvement in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs related to the program or practice. In Year 3, 73% of respondents demonstrated improvement in at least one of these areas after attending training.

AWARE Trainings & Survey Results



AWARE Student Highlights

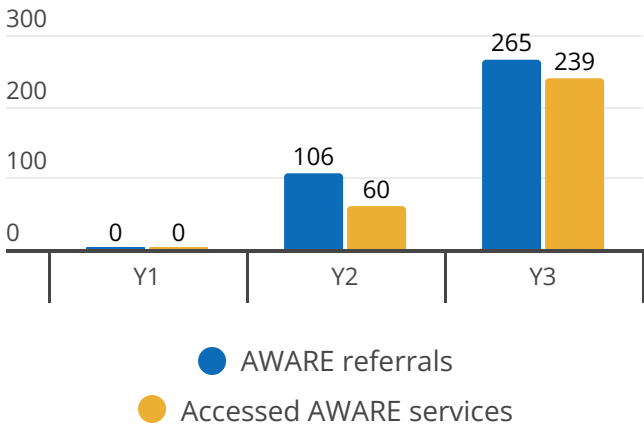
Student support staff at AWARE campuses utilized referral pathways to identify and refer students needing Tier 2 or Tier 3 mental health interventions. After a referral, most students received school-based individual or group counseling services. Service provision began in Year 2 with 57% of students accessing services after referral and in Year 3, 90% of students accessed services after referral. This increase is a result of our efforts to improve streamlining referral pathways, staff retention, training school staff on referral procedures, and utilizing evidence-based screening tools.

Top 5 Referral Reasons K-12 Students

	FY 2023	FY 2024
1	Behavior issues (16%)	Anxiety (16%)
2	Depression (13%)	Depression (14%)
3	Grief (11%)	Other reasons (11%)
4	Anxiety (8%)	Behavior issues (11%)
5	Other reasons (8%)	Trauma (8%)

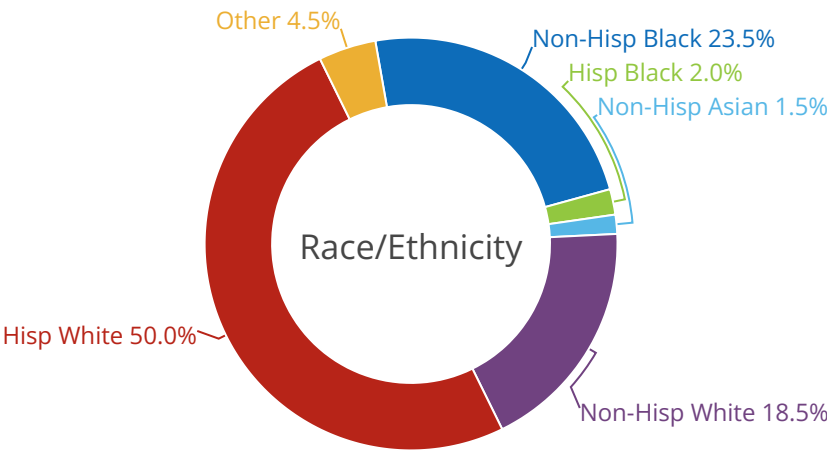
The demographics of students who receive AWARE services are tracked to ensure consistency with the larger makeup of students at their respective schools. This chart shows the demographics of students across the past three years of the AWARE grant. Hispanic White students made up the largest group at 50%, followed by Non-Hispanic Black students at 23.5% and Non-Hispanic White students at 18.5%.

Student Referrals and Services Accessed



Students were referred to the AWARE program for a variety of reasons. Anxiety, depression, and behavior issues accounted for approximately 40% of referral reasons in both years. Grief and trauma were also in the top 5 reasons along with an "other reasons" category that included a range of issues, such as academic concerns, low attendance, self-harming behavior, disordered eating, mood swings, etc.

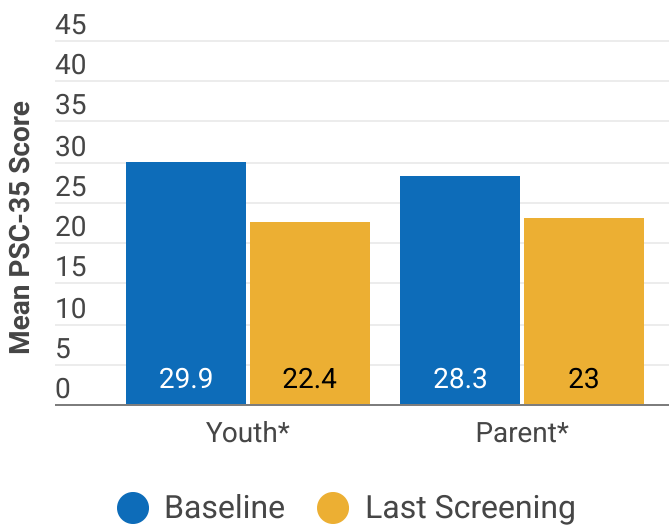
AWARE Student Demographics



Targeted Student Screenings

Targeted screening helps identify key needs and develop care plans for students referred for supports. In measurement-based care, an evidence-based practice, screening tools are repeated during care to monitor student progress and guide care. As part of AWARE, providers were trained to use the Pediatric Symptoms Checklist (PSC-35), which monitors psychosocial symptoms, academic outcomes, and behavioral issues using three subscales. The Attention Subscale focuses on difficulties with focus and concentration, the Internalizing Subscale examines inward emotional distress like anxiety and depression, and the Externalizing Subscale evaluates outward disruptive behaviors.

Change in Mean Total PSC-35 Scores

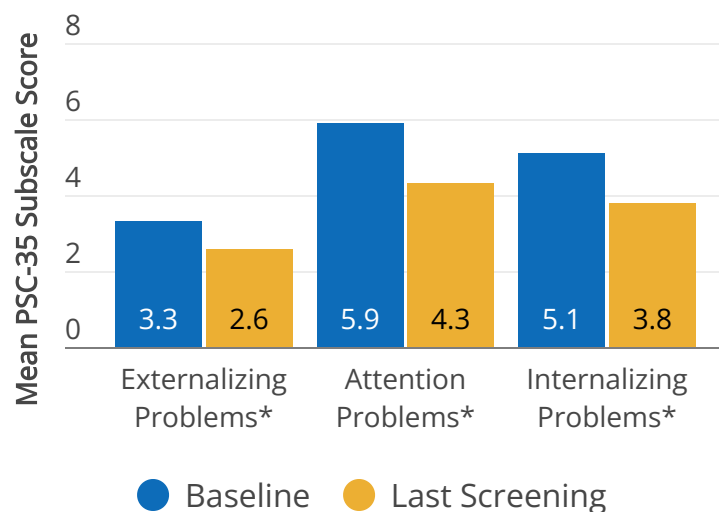


* Denotes statistical difference ($p < .05$)

These results demonstrate improvements among each of the three subscales measured. Reductions were observed in youth-reported subscales for externalizing problems (3.3 to 2.6, $t(133)=3.1$, $p<.0001$), attention problems (5.1 to 4.3, $t(133)=7.1$, $p=.002$), and internalizing problems (5.1 to 3.8, $t(133)=5.8$, $p<.0001$). Additionally, parents also reported improvements across all three subscales, with statistically significant improvement of externalizing symptoms from 5.8 to 4.5 ($p=.007$).

The mean PSC-35 scores showed significant improvements from baseline to the last screening, reflecting positive changes in mental health symptoms. Youth-reported total scores decreased from 29.9 at baseline to 22.4 ($t(133)=7.8$, $p<.0001$), while parent-reported total scores dropped from 28.3 to 23 ($t(45)=3.2$, $p=.003$). This tool was completed monthly by students and their parents to routinely evaluate the student's response to mental health treatment.

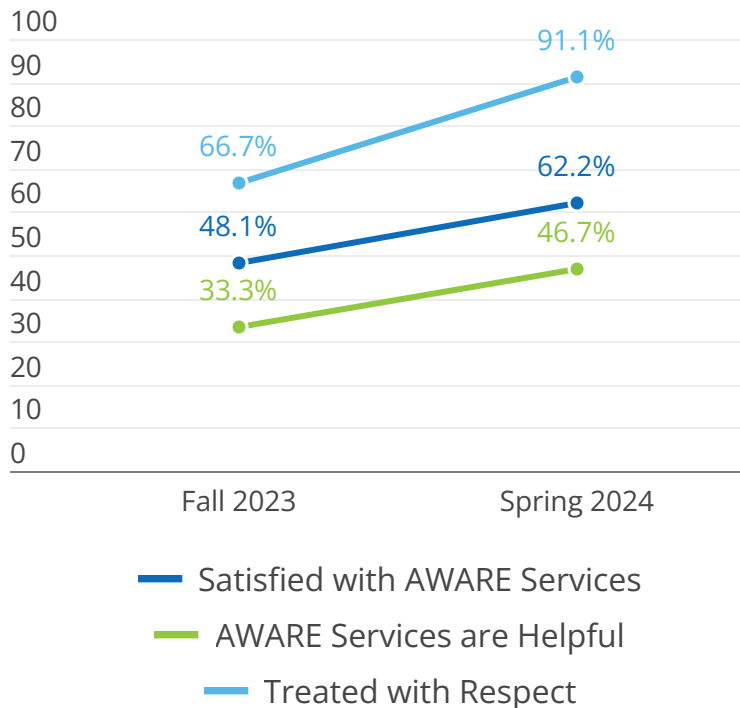
Change in Mean Youth-Reported PSC-35 Subscale Scores



* Denotes statistical difference ($p < .05$)

Impact on Student Well-Being

Proportion of Students Who "Strongly Agree" That AWARE Services Are Helpful



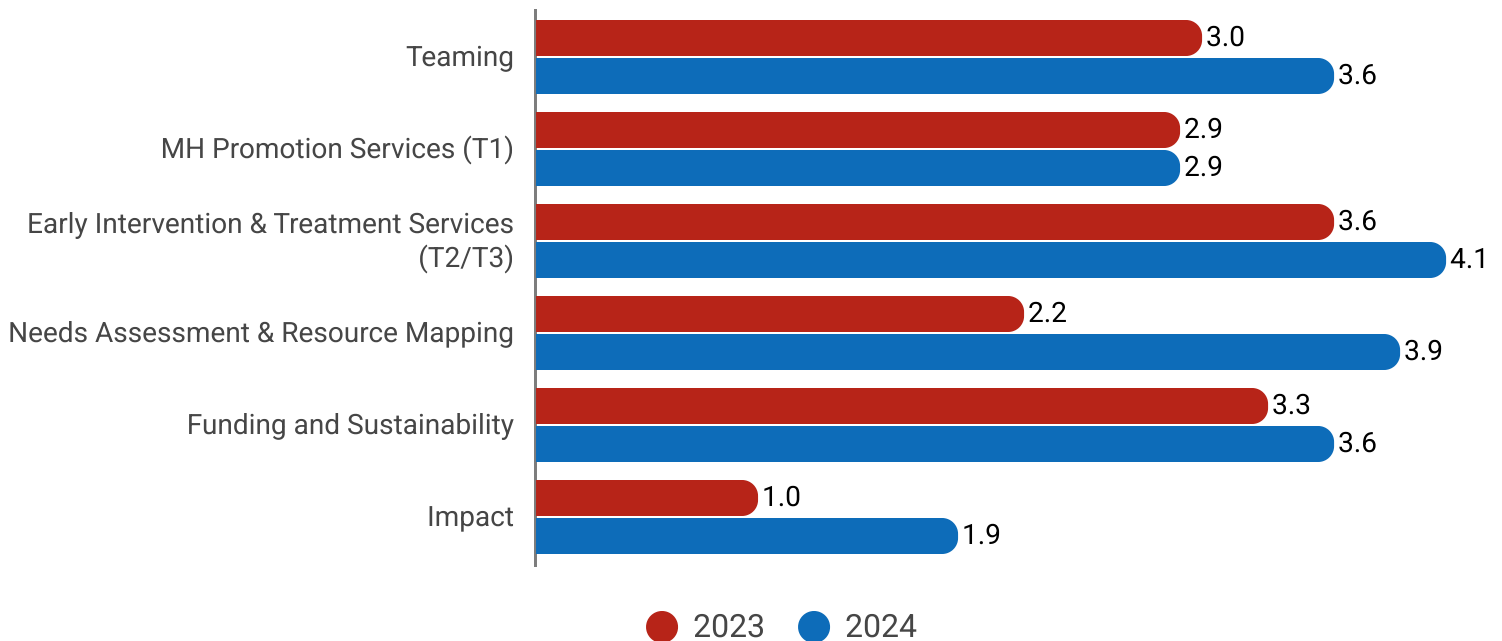
Students are surveyed twice a year on their experiences of receiving AWARE mental health services. When comparing the results of the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 Youth Satisfaction Survey, there were some increases in engagement and satisfaction. The overall response rate increased significantly, from 41.8% (n=28) in Fall 2023 to 70.3% (n=45) in Spring 2024. Student satisfaction with services remained high, with the proportion reporting they **"strongly agreed"** they were satisfied with services increasing from 48.1% in Fall 2023 to 62.2% in Spring 2024. Additionally, the proportion of students who **"strongly agreed"** that services helped them rose from 33.3% to 46.7%. Additionally, students who **"strongly agreed"** that their provider treated them with respect improved from 66.7% to 91.1%. **Overall, 100% of all students surveyed were satisfied with the services they received.**

★ Student Success Story ★

In Elgin ISD, one student began receiving AWARE services after a year of frequent emotional outcries and repeated hospitalizations. This student struggled to manage their emotions and often avoided social settings, opting to hide away from peers. Through consistent therapy sessions, Elgin AWARE staff helped the student process their traumatic experience and develop healthier coping mechanisms. They have not experienced any crises and have grown significantly in confidence, even stepping into visible leadership roles. One AWARE therapist shared a proud moment: "They started doing the school announcements—just reading the lunch menu—but for them, it was huge. At first, they were so nervous, but now it's their favorite thing to do." The student's transformation highlights the impact of consistency and trust, and how AWARE services can empower students to manage their emotions and find their voice.

SHAPE Assessment: Combined AWARE School Districts

AWARE districts use the School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) system's district-level tool to assess their strengths and needs across the core domains of comprehensive school mental health systems. SHAPE scores range from 1.0 to 6.0 and indicate progress across three implementation categories: emerging (1.0 - 2.9), progressing (3.0 - 4.9), and mastery (5.0 - 6.0). In 2024, results of the combined districts showed implementation "progressing" in 5 of 6 domains with notable improvements in the "Teaming," "Early Intervention & Treatment Services (Tier 2 / Tier 3)," and "Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping" domains compared to 2023.



State Infrastructure Highlights

The AWARE grant has led to significant progress in enhancing mental health resources and support for schools in Texas, such as:

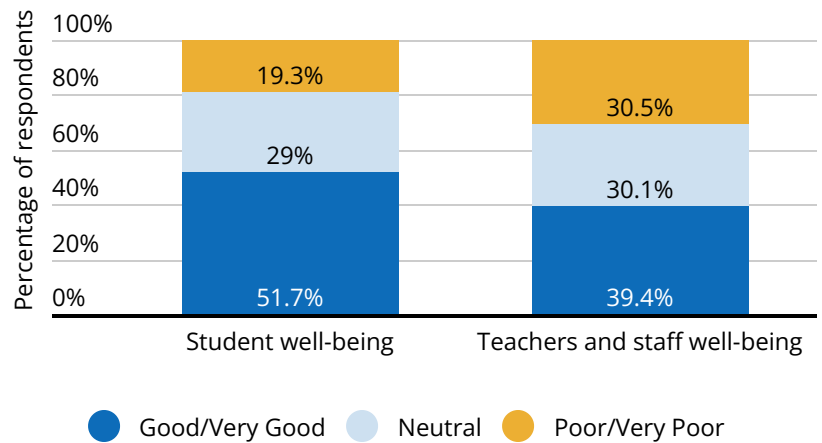
- Three local AWARE grants receive tailored assistance through the AWARE Texas Network.
- Continued collaboration with the Stronger Connections Grant, which aims to promote safe and healthy learning environments, has played a crucial role in developing and administering 934 school climate surveys.
- The Texas School Mental Health website now features an updated searchable repository, making it easier for stakeholders to access vital, local mental health tools and resources.
- The Texas Education Agency (TEA) updated state attendance policies to ensure that students receiving treatment for mental health or substance abuse conditions, including outpatient or partial hospitalization programs, are excused for the treatment period and not withdrawn from school due to temporary absences, such as illness, hospitalization, or suspension.

Looking Ahead

Teachers and staff at AWARE campuses were surveyed on their perceptions of staff and student well-being at their respective campuses. Approximately 51.7% of respondents rated student well-being as Good/Very Good, while only 39.4% reported the same for teachers and staff well-being. Conversely, 30.5% of respondents rated staff well-being as Poor/Very Poor, compared to just 19.3% for student well-being. These findings

suggest that while student well-being is largely perceived positively, there are greater concerns regarding teachers' and staff's well-being, indicating a need for additional support in this area.

Staff's Perception of Well-Being



Addressing Staff Wellness

In their survey responses, staff indicated the need for targeted mental health training and classroom support. In FY25, AWARE staff will be creating a calm space for teachers to recompose before their next class during their break periods. Additionally, AWARE will be dedicating more training over educator wellness and Youth Mental Health First Aid. TEA partnered with Education Service Center 13 (ESC-13) to develop the Educator Wellness and Trauma-Informed Classrooms training, implemented through a Trainer of Trainers model. Each of the twenty ESC regions has trainers to build district capacity, with AWARE LEAs serving as state exemplars.

★ District Spotlight ★

San Marcos CISD's recent mental health trainings for educators were a notable success, thanks to careful planning and strong community partnerships. Project AWARE staff, along with Hill Country MHDD and ESC-13, coordinated staffing and logistical support to train 725 school personnel. AWARE staff noted how the training encouraged staff to see mental health as a shared responsibility within schools, beyond just the counselor's office. The positive feedback received from teachers and leadership reflected a growing interest in building these skills, with plans to offer additional sessions to sustain the momentum.