

Panel Discussion – Student Mental Health

EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE (EDIC)
BECCA BROWN – JUNE 2026

CONTEXT

According to the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), “Mental health is the component of behavioral health that includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health is a state of well-being that enables us to cope with the stresses of life, realize our abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to our community.” A person’s mental health may not be the same from day to day, and it can affect how that person goes through daily life.

Because the topic of student mental health is so broad, the state of Montana does not have a single program to address it. Instead, there are multiple available sources of funding to support varied aspects of students’ mental health. EDIC staff have prepared a more detailed “Student Mental Health Overview” resource document, available on the EDIC “Meeting Materials” web page here:

<https://committees.legmt.gov/#/nonStandingCommittees/4?tab=Meeting+Materials>

SPEAKERS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following individuals will be participating in a discussion on student mental health:

- **Wendy Ekegren**, Director, School Mental Health, Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development (CCFWD) at the University of Montana
- **Meghan Peel**, Administrator, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (BHDD) Services Division of DPHHS
- **Rob Watson**, Executive Director, School Administrators of Montana (SAM)

The speakers were asked to address the following questions as part of the discussion:

- What is the current state landscape of student mental health, and how has it changed over time?
 - Are there any recent or ongoing efforts to support student mental health?
- What are some mental and behavioral health interventions and programs being used in Montana schools?
 - What is a screener and how is it used in the field of mental and behavioral health?
- How does the Medicaid claims/reimbursements process work from a school perspective?
 - What is the Medicaid free care rule reversal, and have any other states explored this option?
 - What would be the cost(s) if the free care rule was reversed in Montana?