

# School Grief Support Network Initiative

## Survey Results: 2018

### About this report

In 2017–2018, The Christi Center provided free counseling services to 40 Austin Independent School District (AISD) students attending East Austin schools who needed grief support. This work was a continuation of grant-funded services first offered to students in 2016–2017 (Lamb, 2017). Similar to last year, AISD’s Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) helped administer a survey to parent(s)/guardian(s) and teachers of students receiving these services prior to their first grief support counseling session and following their last counseling session. Raters assessed participating students’ emotions and behaviors over the past two weeks prior to, and following the counseling sessions, as well as the usefulness of the service provided by The Christi Center (Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 3). Each student should have received four complete ratings (i.e., pre- and post-counseling ratings from their teacher and parent); however, some students only had one rating. Additionally, although participating students’ counselors participated in the pre- and post-counseling survey in Spring 2017, they did not complete the survey this year. Survey items were reworded slightly from Spring 2017 to ask raters about their students’ behaviors over the past 2 weeks rather than over the past month. Additionally, new items were added to better understand participating students’ moods and behaviors as well as the overall perceived benefit of the program. This report examines 2018 ratings of participating students’ emotions and behaviors before and after participating in grief counseling and whether these ratings changed over time.

Results from the survey showed that students who received school grief support counseling withdrew from friends or activities less after receiving school grief counseling services than they did prior to receiving school grief support counseling (Table 1). Additionally, parents/guardians and teachers believed students were less sad after receiving school grief counseling services than they were before receiving school grief counseling services (Table 2). Parents/guardians believed their children were less angry after receiving school grief

Table 1.

**Teachers believed their students were less likely to withdraw from friends or activities after receiving grief support counseling than they were before receiving grief support counseling.**

Thinking about the past two weeks, how often did your student/child...	Parent/guardian		Teacher	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Make physical complaints (such as headaches, stomach aches, etc.)?	2.08	2.44	2.21	1.79
Have disruptions in their sleep patterns (such as ability to fall asleep, sleep through the night, nightmares, etc.)?	1.79	1.96	2.50	1.50
Appear overly tired (such as falling asleep in class)?	1.39	1.84	1.72	1.59
Get in trouble or fights at school?	1.62	1.23	1.66	1.69
Withdraw from friends or activities (acting quiet, not participating in activities or volunteering in class, etc.)?	1.74	1.74	2.34	1.76*

Source. 2017–2018 School Grief Support Network Survey

Note. Response options ranged and from 1 (never) to 5 (daily/nightly).

\* significant difference between pre- and post-intervention survey responses at  $p < .05$ .

counseling services than they were before receiving these services (Table 2). According to teachers' observations, the students' behaviors that showed the greatest change after they received grief support counseling services were being less nervous, being less frustrated, and being better able to express their feelings.

Table 2.

**Teachers believed their students were better able to use coping skills and express feelings after receiving grief support counseling services.**

Thinking about this past two weeks, how often was your student/child...	Parent/guardian		Teacher	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Sad?	2.79	2.24*	2.68	2.17†
Angry?	3.14	2.41*	1.90	1.86
Worried or nervous?	2.24	2.56	2.71	2.24†
Frustrated?	2.58	2.64	2.48	2.21
Unable to concentrate on schoolwork?	2.91	2.36	2.90	2.66
More active than usual?	2.57	2.16	2.28	2.21†
Less active than usual?	1.97	1.96	2.14	1.69†
Able to express feelings?	3.08	3.16	3.34	3.62*
Able to use coping skills (such as self-calming, self-soothing activities, reaching out for help, etc.)?	2.62	2.71	2.74	3.44*

Source. 2017–2018 School Grief Support Network Survey

Note. Response options ranged and from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

† significant difference between pre- and post-intervention survey responses at  $p < .10$

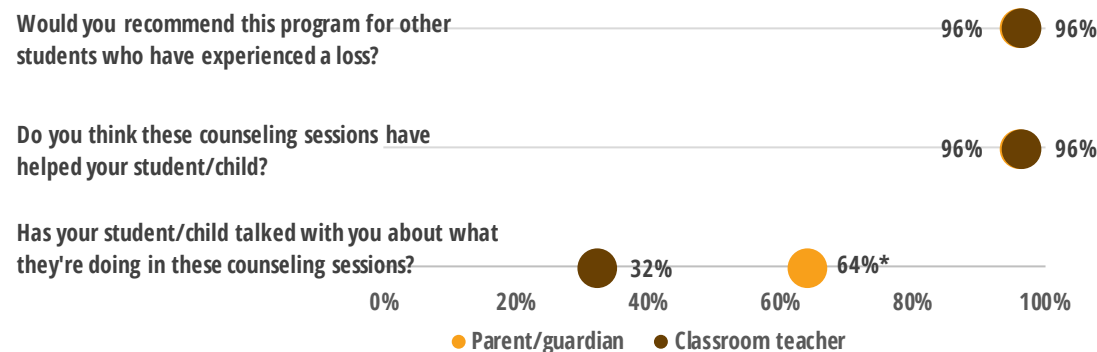
\* significant difference between pre- and post-intervention survey responses at  $p < .05$ .

Finally, parents/guardians were more likely than their child's teacher to say that their child talked with them about what she or he did during the school grief support sessions (64% compared with 32%; Figure 1). Finally, more than 95% of teachers and parents/guardians felt that the grief support counseling sessions helped their student/child, and would recommend the program for other students/children who experience a loss.

Together, these results highlight the importance of offering these services to children who have suffered a loss.

Figure 1.

**Teachers believed students were better able to use coping skills after receiving grief support counseling than they were before receiving school grief support services.**



Source. 2017–2018 School Grief Support Network Survey

Note. Percentages reflect the percentage of "yes" responses

\* significant difference between respondents at  $p < .05$ .

**About The Christi Center**



The Christi Center provides support services for those experiencing grief and loss in Austin, Texas. Although The Christi Center offers free support for AISD students, there is a wait list for services. Additionally, some families experience time/transportation constraints that hinder them from using these services.

This is the second year that The Christi Center used grant funding to provide grief support services to high-need students attending schools in East Austin. Counseling was provided to students identified by their counselor as in need of grief support. These services were provided by retired AISD counselors trained by Christi Center staff, thereby allowing counselors to offer participating students counseling at their school and during regular school hours. This circumvented the transportation and child care issues that often prevent students from receiving grief counseling. In 2018, 40 students received six to eight grief counseling sessions. For more information, please visit: <http://christicenter.org/>

Reference: Lamb, L. M. (2017). *School Grief Support Network Initiative: Survey Results, Spring 2017* (DRE publication No. 16.42). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.