

## News



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### **Nelson Mullins Attorneys Lead Georgia Appleseed Effort for Education Reform**

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Georgia legislators are prioritizing a transformative effort to improve behavioral health and school climate for students in schools across the state. A strong showing of Nelson Mullins attorneys has been involved in this effort through [Georgia Appleseed](#), a nonprofit public interest law center for which Atlanta partner Taylor Daly is immediate past board chair.

In light of this statewide education reform, Georgia Appleseed has been using its platform and resources to launch the [Bridges to Behavioral Wellness](#) program, which is meant to improve systems of care within schools and help people navigate these complex systems. More than 35 pro bono volunteers from Nelson Mullins have donated their time and knowledge to this effort. Volunteers will be conducting interviews with stakeholders, providing legal research support, coordinating the interview and data collection process across all of the other law firms assisting with the project, and writing the final public report. After the Parkland shooting in Florida, Georgia representatives tasked the Georgia House and Senate Study Committees on School Safety to investigate the health and safety of students, both as individuals and as members of a larger school climate. Other factors, including the passing of two bills that would provide support for students with disciplinary issues and would enact school climate reform, as well as a sizable donation from the state's General Assembly [lined up in Georgia schools' favor](#).

The committee came away with two recommendations — that all schools take measures to improve students' accessibility to mental health counseling through the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities' Apex program and to enrich school climate by adopting the Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) practice. Research based on schools that have adopted one or both of these measures has shown a marked improvement in school climate and behavioral health among students.

The Bridges to Behavioral Wellness program will collect information from a wide variety of stakeholders to gain knowledge about the current barriers to access to behavioral health resources and potential solutions that can be put in place across the state to improve that access. Through this effort, pro bono volunteers have been laying out Behavioral Wellness and Advocacy Guides, engaging schools and local communities in conversation, and getting involved with local school climate committees in each county as they integrate PBIS practices and the Apex program into their structure.

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