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October 26, 2006

Panel: Mental health tests for students optional

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A state legislative study commission Wednesday opposed screening all Hoosier schoolchildren for mental health problems. Instead, the panel supported an Indiana Department of Education plan to addresses mental health in children but does not require schools to screen them.

State Rep. Cindy Noe, R-Indianapolis, chairwoman of the mental health commission, had wanted a stronger statement to delay the plan by a year so the legislature could make clear that screenings are optional and to tweak other parts of the law. Committee members rejected that proposal.

The committee's report to the legislature is nonbinding but carries weight as lawmakers consider further action.

Advocates say that screening children at school can provide early detection of treatable mental illnesses and prevent suicides; opponents call it an invasion of privacy and say that job is better left to parents.

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