

CHAPTER 322

AN ACT establishing a grant program for the training of school-based mental health services providers and supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.18A:6-33.18 Grant program for training of school-based mental health professionals.

1. a. There is established in the Department of Education a grant program to assist school districts in the training of school-based mental health services providers, expand the pipeline of high-quality, trained providers, and address the shortages of mental health professionals in schools. As used in this section, “school-based mental health services provider” means a State-licensed or State-certified school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, or other State-licensed or State-certified mental health professional qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

b. Grants under the program shall be awarded on a competitive basis. School districts or groups of school districts that receive a grant under the program shall use the funds for efforts to create and grow programs and partnerships that train students who are attending graduate school to become school-based mental health services providers.

c. To be eligible for consideration of a grant award under the program, a school district or a group of school districts seeking to participate in the program together shall submit an application to the Commissioner of Education, in accordance with application procedures and requirements prescribed by the commissioner. A school district or a group of school districts applying for a grant award under the program shall, prior to submitting an application, form a partnership with one or more institutions of higher education that offer graduate programs in school-based mental health fields. The partnership shall allow a student enrolled in an institution of higher education’s graduate program to perform applicable fieldwork, credit hours, internships, externships, or other related training as applicable for the academic program of the student.

A grant application submitted by a school district or a group of school districts shall include information regarding the following:

(1) the details of the partnership formed between the school district or group of school districts and an institution of higher education, including plans for supervising the graduate students in school settings and ensuring that the students are trained in providing mental health supports and services to students in the school district or districts;

(2) a description of how the lack of school-based mental health services providers is affecting students in the school district or districts;

(3) the school district or districts’ unmet need for student mental health supports and services;

(4) the number of school-based mental health services providers currently employed by the school district or districts and their caseloads;

(5) the existing ratio of school-based mental health services providers to students enrolled in the district or districts;

(6) the schools and student populations that will benefit from the grant funding;

(7) the objectives for the number of graduate students the school district or school districts anticipate training under the grant program;

(8) plans to collaborate with federal, State, regional, and local entities to expand the pipeline of school-based mental health services providers and achieve partnership goals and objectives; and

(9) any other information as required by the commissioner.

d. (1) The commissioner shall establish selection criteria for the awarding of grants under the program, including consideration of the information listed in subsection c. of this section. Grants

shall be awarded based upon review of the applications and subject to the availability of funds. The commissioner shall establish the amount for each grant that is approved.

(2) Priority for grants awarded under the program shall be given to school districts that demonstrate an unmet need for mental health services in the school community.

e. The Department of Education shall annually apply for and use any federal grant funds or other federal assistance which may be available to be used for the grant program established pursuant to this section including, but not limited to, funds under the federal Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program, the federal “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,” Pub.L.116-136, the federal “Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021,” Pub.L.116-260, and the federal “American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021,” Pub.L.117-2. The department may, if applicable, apply for federal grant funds or other federal assistance on behalf of one or more school districts approved for participation in the grant program established pursuant to this section. Any federal grant funds or other federal assistance awarded to the department shall first be used to provide grant awards to school districts, prior to using State funds under the grant program established pursuant to this section.

f. Within three years after receiving a grant award under the program, a school district or a group of school districts shall submit a report to the Commissioner of Education containing information on the use of the grant funds. The report shall include, at a minimum, information on the number of graduate students trained under the program, the number of graduate students who were hired as school-based mental health services providers using grant funds, increases or improvements in the provision of student mental health supports and services as a result of the grant, and any notable changes in school climate, attendance rates, student achievement, school discipline, or other measures since receiving the grant.

18A:6-33.19 Report to Governor, Legislature.

2. The Commissioner of Education shall submit a report to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), no later than four years after the establishment of the grant program established pursuant to section 1 of this act. The report shall include, but need not be limited to, information on the number of grant applicants, the number and amounts of the grant awards, information provided by school districts and groups of school districts in the reports submitted pursuant to subsection f. of section 1 of this act, and any recommendations concerning the continuation or expansion of the grant program.

3. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Education a sum of \$500,000 for costs associated with the grant program established pursuant to section 1 of this act.

4. The State Board of Education shall adopt, pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), rules and regulations necessary to carry out the provisions of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to the first full school year following the date of enactment.

Approved December 21, 2021.