

CHAPTER 323

AN ACT prioritizing certain applicants under the School-Linked Services Program and supplementing chapter 5B of Title 30 of the Revised Statutes.

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

C.30:5B-35 School-Linked Services, contract awarding; priority given to applicants expanding mental health counseling student services.

1. a. In awarding contracts to provide School-Linked Services, the Department of Children and Families shall give priority to new applicants and applicants seeking to expand current programs that, at minimum, include in their application a center or other entity that focuses on providing individual, family, and group clinical mental health counseling services to students. The center or other entity shall offer to students services that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (1) access to mental health counseling services during, before, or after school hours; and
- (2) access to clinical mental health professional staff, who may be school district employees, that provide mental health counseling services to students including in-person or telehealth or telemedicine services, as applicable and as permitted by law.

The Department of Children and Families shall give priority consideration to new applicants and applicants seeking to expand current programs that offer the services included in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this subsection immediately upon the effective date of this act.

b. Of the new applicants and applicants seeking to expand current programs that include in their application a center or other entity in accordance with subsection a. of this section, the Department of Children and Families shall consider factors including but not limited to the following in making a determination when awarding contracts to provide School-Linked Services:

- (1) whether the applicant is, currently operates in, or proposes to operate in a school district that is designated as a “high-need” school district, as determined by metrics set by the Commissioner of Children and Families;
- (2) the existence of a partnership between the center or other entity and community mental health providers and existing community resources;
- (3) whether the applicant has developed a plan for mental health professionals working in its center or other entity to develop curricula to train students and staff on identifying the signs of mental health conditions and addressing risk factors that may impact student mental health; and
- (4) whether the center or other entity created by the applicant can ensure access to clinical mental health professional staff who specialize in a variety of mental health areas, or demonstrates a plan to retain the services of clinical mental health professionals in a variety of mental health areas.

c. For purposes of this section, “applicant” means a school district, school, or other eligible entity seeking to be awarded a contract to provide School-Linked Services. The term shall include new applicants as well as a school district, school, or other eligible entity that is seeking to expand current programs under an existing contract to provide School-Linked Services.

2. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire on the first day of the 25th month next following enactment.

Approved December 21, 2021.