

CHAPTER 456

AN ACT establishing the Student Wellness Grant Program 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:6-33.20 Student Wellness Grant Program established; support programs on mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student resilience.

1. a. The Commissioner of Education, in full consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, shall establish the Student Wellness Grant Program. The purpose of the Student Wellness Grant Program shall be to provide grants that support school districts in implementing school-based programs and practices that promote mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student resilience.

b. A grant awarded through the Student Wellness Grant Program shall be used to support school districts in:

(1) the provision of school-based mental health clinics or workshops for both students and families that engage the community on universal topics of student wellness and mental health;

(2) the implementation and coordination of policies, practices, and programs that support the mental, emotional, and social needs of students;

(3) the provision of mental health services on-site at the school to students in need of short-term counseling or crisis intervention focused on mental health or situational concerns, such as grief or family transitions, by a properly trained and licensed mental health professional; and

(4) the timely and appropriate referral of students in need of long-term therapeutic counseling or mental health intervention with available community resources.

C.18A:6-33.21 Grant program application; criteria; special consideration.

2. a. A school district which elects to participate in the grant program created pursuant to this act shall submit an application to the Commissioner of Education to be reviewed by a team of qualified professionals within the Department of Education and Department of Children and Families in such form as required by the commissioner. The application shall include, but need not be limited to:

(1) a description of current school district actions to support the socioemotional needs of students in a stigma-free environment and how a grant will support the expansion of those efforts;

(2) a commitment to provide staff training, including a clearly outlined plan on who will receive training, the resources needed for training, and how the training will be implemented. The training shall include content on how to recognize symptoms of mental health conditions in the student population, and a component on identifying at-risk students most likely to be in need of mental health supports; and

(3) the school district protocol for on-site and community referrals for targeted therapeutic interventions, such as short-term and long-term counseling.

b. The Commissioner of Education, in full consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, shall develop criteria for the evaluation of applications for grants. Based upon the criteria developed by the commissioners, and within the limit of available appropriations, the Commissioner of Education shall allocate to each selected school district a grant in such amount as determined by the commissioner. Special consideration shall be given to applicants that: can demonstrate strong ties to relevant community resources, such as mental

health providers; or have secured external funding for their student wellness program from community partners.

C.18A:6-33.22 Students not compelled to participate.

3. No student shall be compelled to participate in any programs or services offered by a school district pursuant to a student wellness grant received under this act, if the student or the student's parent or guardian objects to participation.

C.18A:6-33.23 Development, dissemination of best practices.

4. The Commissioner of Education, in full consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, shall develop and disseminate to all school districts best practices in school-based programs that promote mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student resilience.

C.18A:6-33.24 Grant recipients to submit results report to Commissioner of Education.

5. Each school district that receives a student wellness grant shall prepare and submit to the Commissioner of Education annually a report on its experience with and the effects of the program. The report shall include, at a minimum, the specific programs and practices implemented as a result of the grant to promote mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student resilience, and any notable changes in school climate, attendance rates, student achievement, school discipline, or other measures since receiving the grant. The report shall include, to the greatest extent feasible, quantifiable measures of the program's impact.

C.18A:6-33.25 Commissioner of Education to report to Governor, Legislature on Student Wellness Grant Program implementation.

6. The Commissioner of Education, in full consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, shall submit annually a report to the Governor and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), the Legislature containing information on the implementation of the Student Wellness Grant Program. The report shall include relevant information from the reports submitted to the Commissioner of Education by the grant recipients pursuant to section 5 of this act.

C.18A:6-33.26 Available federal funds for grant program, including Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

7. The Department of Education may use any federal funds which may become available, including funds provided under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Pub.L. 116-136, to effectuate the purposes of this act. Federal funds available to the department to effectuate the purposes of this act shall be used to provide grant awards to school districts in amounts deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Education, prior to using State funds which may be appropriated by the Legislature for the grant program established pursuant to this act. If sufficient funding is unavailable, the grant program shall be paused and shall resume once funding becomes available by way of legislative appropriation or other means.

8. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 18, 2022.