

SENATE, No. 2716

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JULY 23, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator JAMES BEACH

District 6 (Burlington and Camden)

Senator M. TERESA RUIZ

District 29 (Essex)

Co-Sponsored by:

Senators Corrado, A.M.Bucco, Pou and Turner

SYNOPSIS

Establishes Student Wellness Grant Program in DOE.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/3/2021)

1 **AN ACT** establishing the Student Wellness Grant Program and
2 supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. a. The Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the
8 Commissioner of Children and Families, shall establish the Student
9 Wellness Grant Program. The purpose of the Student Wellness
10 Grant Program shall be to provide grants that support school
11 districts in implementing school-based programs and practices that
12 promote mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student
13 resilience.

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

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

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

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

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

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32 2. a. A school district which elects to participate in the grant
33 program created pursuant to this act shall submit an application to
34 the Commissioner of Education in such form as required by the
35 commissioner. The application shall include, but need not be
36 limited to:

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

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

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

4 b. The Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the
5 Commissioner of Children and Families, shall develop criteria for
6 the evaluation of applications for grants. Based upon the criteria
7 developed by the commissioners, and within the limit of available
8 appropriations, the Commissioner of Education shall allocate to
9 each selected school district a grant in such amount as determined
10 by the commissioner. The Commissioner of Education shall give
11 special consideration to applicants that: can demonstrate strong ties
12 to relevant community resources, such as mental health providers;
13 or have secured external funding for their student wellness program
14 from community partners.

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

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

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

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

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47 7. The Department of Education shall use any available federal
48 funds which may become available, including funds provided under

1 the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,
2 Pub.L. 116-136, to effectuate the purposes of this act. Any federal
3 funds available to the department shall first be used to provide grant
4 awards to school districts, prior to using State funds under the grant
5 program established pursuant to this act.

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7 8. This act shall take effect immediately.

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10 STATEMENT

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12 This bill directs the Commissioner of Education, in consultation
13 with the Commissioner of Children and Families, to establish the
14 Student Wellness Grant Program. The purpose of the Student
15 Wellness Grant Program will be to provide grants that support
16 school districts in implementing school-based programs and
17 practices that promote mental wellness, social and emotional
18 learning, and student resilience.

19 Under the bill, a grant awarded through the Student Wellness
20 Grant Program will be used to support school districts in:

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

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

28 (3) the provision of mental health services on-site at the school to
29 students in need of short-term counseling or crisis intervention focused
30 on mental health or situational concerns; and

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

34 The bill directs a school district which elects to participate in the
35 grant program to submit an application to the Commissioner of
36 Education that must include:

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

40 (2) a commitment to provide staff training; and

41 (3) the school district protocol for on-site and community
42 referrals for targeted therapeutic interventions.

43 The bill directs the Commissioner of Education, in consultation
44 with the Commissioner of Children and Families, to develop criteria
45 for the evaluation of applications for grants and to allocate grants
46 within the limit of available appropriations. The Commissioner of
47 Education will give special consideration to applicants that: can
48 demonstrate strong ties to relevant community resources; or have

1 secured external funding for their student wellness program from
2 community partners. The bill also directs the Commissioner of
3 Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Children and
4 Families, to develop and disseminate to all school districts model
5 policies and best practices in school-based programs that promote
6 mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student
7 resilience. Under the bill, no student will be compelled to
8 participate in the programs and services implemented as a result of
9 the grant, if the student or the student's parent or guardian, objects
10 to participation.

11 Finally, each school district that receives a student wellness grant
12 must prepare and submit to the Commissioner of Education a report
13 on its experience with and the effects of the program. The
14 Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner
15 of Children and Families, must submit a report to the Governor and
16 the Legislature on the implementation of the Student Wellness
17 Grant Program, which will include relevant information from the
18 reports submitted by the school districts participating in the grant
19 program.

20 The bill directs the Department of Education to use any available
21 federal funds which may become available, including funds from
22 the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,
23 to effectuate the bill's purposes. Any federal funds available to the
24 department will first be used to provide grant awards to school
25 districts, prior to using State funds.