Sponsored by:
Assemblyman LOUIS D. GREENWALD
District 6 (Burlington and Camden)
Assemblywoman PAMELA R. LAMPIITT
District 6 (Burlington and Camden)
Assemblyman RAJ MUKHERJI
District 33 (Hudson)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblyman Benson, Assemblywomen Vainieri Huttle, Murphy,
Assemblyman Verrelli, Assemblywoman Mosquera, Assemblyman
Caputo, Assemblywomen Reynolds-Jackson, Jasey, Assemblymen
Johnson, Chiaravalloti, Assemblywomen McKnight, Quijano, Swain,
Lopez and Assemblyman Tully

SYNOPSIS
Establishes Student Wellness Grant Program in DOE.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As introduced.
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:

1. a. The Commissioner of Education, in 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.

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 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 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. The Commissioner of Education shall give special consideration 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.

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.

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

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.

6. The Commissioner of Education, in 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.

7. The Department of Education shall use any available 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. Any federal funds available 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 act.

8. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill directs the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, to establish the Student Wellness Grant Program. The purpose of the Student Wellness Grant Program will 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.

Under the bill, a grant awarded through the Student Wellness Grant Program will 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; and
4. the timely and appropriate referral of students in need of long-term therapeutic counseling or mental health intervention with available community resources.

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

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; and
3. the school district protocol for on-site and community referrals for targeted therapeutic interventions.

The bill directs the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, to develop criteria for the evaluation of applications for grants and to allocate grants within the limit of available appropriations. The Commissioner of Education will give special consideration to applicants that: can demonstrate strong ties to relevant community resources; or have
secured external funding for their student wellness program from community partners. The bill also directs the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Children and Families, to develop and disseminate to all school districts model policies and best practices in school-based programs that promote mental wellness, social and emotional learning, and student resilience. Under the bill, no student will be compelled to participate in the programs and services implemented as a result of the grant, if the student or the student’s parent or guardian, objects to participation.

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

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