ASSEMBLY, No. 4434

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JULY 23, 2020

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District 6 (Burlington and Camden)
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Assemblyman Verrelli, Assemblywoman Mosquera, Assemblyman
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Johnson, Chiavarotli, Assemblywomen McKnight, Quijano, Swain,
Lopez, Assemblyman Tully, Assemblywoman DiMaso, Senators Corrado,
A.M.Bucco, Pou, Turner, Gopal, Assemblymen Freiman and Moen

SYNOPSIS
Establishes Student Wellness Grant Program in DOE.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As amended by the Senate on June 21, 2021.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 12/20/2021)
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 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.

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

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.
Matter enclosed in superscript numerals has been adopted as follows:
Senate floor amendments adopted June 21, 2021.
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. [The Commissioner of
Education shall give 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.

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 full 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 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.

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.