



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #507

### Mental Health Programs (DPI -- Categorical Aids)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 467, #8 and 9, and Page 495, #5]

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#### CURRENT LAW

Under current law, aid for school mental health programs is provided to school districts, independent charter schools, and private choice program schools that increase their expenditures on school social workers from one year to the next. Aid reimburses districts or schools for 50% of the increase in these expenditures from one year to the next, and remaining funds are distributed based on each district or school's total expenditures on school social workers. Funding is equal to \$6,000,000 GPR annually.

Additionally, \$6,500,000 GPR annually is appropriated for a school-based mental health services grant to support collaboration between schools and community health agencies to provide mental health services to pupils.

DPI is required to provide training to school district staff and the instructional staff of independent charter schools regarding the following: (a) screening, brief interventions, and referral to treatment (SBIRT); (b) trauma sensitive schools; and (c) youth mental health first aid. Funding totaling \$420,000 GPR annually is provided for this training.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

1. According to the Wisconsin Behavioral Health Barometer document published by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2020, between 2016 and 2019, 14.9% of Wisconsin youth ages 12-17 reported a major depressive episode in the past year. During the same time period, 12.1% of young adults aged 18-25 in Wisconsin reported having had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year. Wisconsin's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that of the pupils surveyed, 49.0% reported high levels of anxiety, 28.5% indicated depression, and

18.5% reported that they had engaged in self-harm over the previous twelve months.

2. Over the past several years, DPI has received federal funding related to pupil mental health under the following grant programs: (a) a five-year grant totaling \$9.0 million awarded by SAMHSA in 2019 for Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (AWARE), which promotes mental health awareness and training for school personnel; and (b) a five-year grant beginning in 2020 and totaling \$10.0 million from the U.S. Department of Education to increase the number of qualified mental health service professionals providing school-based mental health services to pupils.

3. Federal aid provided under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides additional resources for school districts in the 2021-23 biennium that can be used to provide mental health services and supports to pupils, according to the allowable uses enumerated under federal law for the elementary and secondary school emergency relief (ESSER) fund. Under the three acts, \$2,401.7 million in federal aid was provided under ESSER, at least 90% of which must be distributed directly to local educational agencies. However, this funding is one-time and it could be argued that it would be preferable to use the funds for one-time or short-term costs rather than for ongoing mental health programs. Additionally, the federal funding is distributed to districts primarily based on their number and percentage of children in poverty, and the per pupil distribution among school districts varies significantly. These issues are discussed in a separate issue paper on federal coronavirus aid.

4. Prior to 2018-19, the primary state funding related to mental health issues in schools was state funding totaling approximately \$1.3 million annually for alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) grants to school districts. These grants fund prevention and early intervention activities, including K-12 curriculum development, family involvement, drug abuse resistance education, and pupil-designed AODA prevention or intervention projects. In 2019-20, grants were provided to 75 school districts and five CESAs. In addition, administrative funding for AODA programming totaling \$0.6 million GPR annually is provided to DPI to provide training, technical assistance, and information regarding alcohol and other drug abuse to school districts. The programs described in this paper were created under 2017 Act 59, and first provided aid in the 2018-19 school year.

### **Aid for School Mental Health Staff**

5. Under current law, the program reimburses eligible school districts, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in a private school choice program for expenditures on social worker services as follows: (a) 50% reimbursement of the increase in expenditures for school social worker services in the prior school year compared to two years' prior; and (b) a proportion of unreimbursed total expenditures for social workers, based on the amount remaining in the appropriation after payments are made under (a). Eligible districts and schools are defined as school districts, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in a choice program that increased their expenditures on social workers in the prior school year compared to two years' prior. Eligible expenditures include salary or fringe benefits paid to employ, hire, or retrain social workers or the costs to contract for the services of a social worker.

6. Aid under the program, equal to \$3,000,000 GPR, was first provided in 2018-19. Additional aid was provided under 2019 Act 9, which increased total annual funding for the grant program to \$6,000,000 GPR. In 2019-20, 82 school districts, two independent charter schools, and three private choice schools qualified for aid under the program. Aid under the first tier of aid eligibility (50% reimbursement of the increase in expenditures for school social worker services in the prior school year compared to two years' prior) was fully funded, at a total cost of \$1.9 million. Eligibility under the second tier of aid (unreimbursed total expenditures for social workers among districts and schools that qualified under the first tier of aid) totaled \$44.9 million, and was prorated at 9.1%.

7. School social workers work with school staff, pupils, parents, and community resources to address issues that may impede pupils' academic success and participation in school. DPI indicates that services are most often provided to the following pupils: (a) pupils who are chronically absent from school; (b) pupils who are at a high risk of dropping out or not graduating, including school-aged parents or pregnant pupils, adjudicated delinquents, or pupils who abuse alcohol or other drugs; (c) pupils in special education programs or being evaluated for special education needs; (d) pupils with behavioral issues, such as aggression; (e) pupils experiencing family challenges, such as domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, homelessness, or mental illness; or (f) pupils who have experienced traumatic events such as child abuse or neglect, sexual assault, neighborhood violence, harassment, or bullying.

8. State law defines a "pupil services professional" as a school counselor, social worker, psychologist, or nurse. Under current law, school districts are required to provide guidance and counseling services and provide for emergency nursing services, but are not required to fill other pupil services positions. At the time the school mental health aid program was created, social workers were targeted for reimbursement under the program because of concern that relatively few pupils had access to a social worker in their school, and because their role in collaborative work with pupils, families, school personnel, and community-based services was considered valuable for addressing pupils' mental health needs. The following table compares the number of school districts that did not report any general fund expenditures for pupil services professionals in the 2016-17 school year compared to the 2018-19 school year, based on WISEstaff data collections.

**Districts Reporting No General Fund Expenditures on Pupil Services Professionals**

	<u>2016-17</u>	<u>2018-19</u>
Social worker	328	287
School psychologist	189	175
School counselor	3	4
Health (such as school nurse)	108	45

9. School districts are also eligible for special education categorical aid for social workers and other pupil services professionals for the portion of their time spent providing services to special education services, subject to maximum percentages. State law indicates that the maximum percentages must be set in administrative rule to be equal to the average percentage of work time

spent by each position to provide services to pupils with disabilities. The maximum percentage of salaries that can be reimbursed under the special education aid program is equal to 59% for school social workers, 10% for guidance counselors, 29% for nurses, and 84% for psychologists.

10. Assembly Bill 68/Senate Bill 111 would provide an increase of \$22,500,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$24,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 for the program. The bill would also modify current law to include expenditures for any pupil services professional, including school counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses, rather than only social workers as under current law. Additionally, the bill, would modify the program so that all districts, independent charter schools, and private choice schools could qualify for reimbursement of any expenditures made to employ, hire, or retain pupil services professionals under the second tier of aid. It is estimated that the funding under the bill would be sufficient to fully fund 50% of the increase in expenditures for pupil services professionals under the first tier of aid, and fund approximately 10% of statewide costs for pupil services professionals incurred by public school districts, independent charter schools, and private choice schools under the second tier of aid. [Alternative A1]

11. Under current law, if funds remain in the appropriation after the first tier of aid is allocated, the remaining funds are distributed among eligible schools and districts based on their total unreimbursed expenditures for social workers. Only those schools and districts that qualify for aid under the first tier are eligible for a portion of the aid under the second tier. If a school district or school increases its expenditures for school social workers, it receives significant state support in the second year of the increased expenditures from the categorical aid, but no ongoing state funding in the following years. This approach may prevent some school districts or schools from increasing their expenditures for social workers or other pupil services professionals if they anticipate difficulty providing ongoing funding for the new staff. It could be argued that the proposed modification of current law would provide a more sustainable source of funding for those districts or schools considering increasing their funding for pupil services professionals.

12. The Committee may wish to provide additional aid for the school mental health program, but at a reduced cost. For example, an increase of \$6,000,000 GPR annually would double the available funding for the program. If total funding for the program had equaled \$12 million GPR in 2019-20, aid under the second tier would have been prorated at 22.5%, rather than 9.1% as under current law. [Alternative A2]

### **School-Based Mental Health Services Grants**

13. Under current law, \$6,500,000 GPR is awarded annually through a competitive grant process for providing mental health services to pupils in collaboration with community health agencies. Eligible applicants include school districts, independent charter schools, or consortia of school boards, charter schools, or both.

14. Examples of allowable activities under the grant include the following: (a) evidence-based mental health curriculum and programs; (b) training for school staff related to mental health; (c) contracting with community mental health providers to provide services such as consultation, training, or mentoring; (d) mental or behavioral health screening; or (e) parent training and informational events. Grants are awarded for a two-year period, with grant amounts of \$10,000 to

\$75,000 awarded in each year. Grant applications must include a memorandum of understanding or letter of commitment from a partnering community mental health provider.

15. In 2019-20, 106 grants were awarded to school districts and consortia of school districts. Grant amounts ranged from \$13,100 to the maximum award of \$75,000. DPI indicated that the grant application process was competitive, with demand exceeding available funding. Projects funded through the grants include providing pupil support groups led by school and community mental health providers, developing referral processes to ensure that pupils are referred to qualified providers, creating spaces in schools for mental health professionals to work with pupils, and providing training to staff and pupils to recognize and respond to mental health challenges. The next round of grant awards will be announced in the summer of 2021.

16. AB 68/SB 111 would provide an additional \$3.5 million GPR annually for the grants, bringing total grant funding to \$10 million GPR annually, which would allow for grants to be awarded to more applicants in future years. The bill would also modify statutory language to allow applicants to partner with mental health providers, rather than requiring partnership with community mental health agencies as required under current law. This change would allow school districts that are geographically distant from a community mental health agency, particularly those that are located in rural areas, to apply for a grant by partnering with an individual provider or using telehealth. [Alternative B1]

### **Mental Health and School Climate Training Programs**

17. Under current law, DPI is required to provide training to school district staff and the instructional staff of independent charter schools regarding the following: (a) screening, brief interventions, and referral to treatment (SBIRT); (b) trauma sensitive schools; and (c) youth mental health first aid. Base level funding is equal to \$420,000 GPR annually. Funding was first provided in 2017-18.

18. SBIRT is a process that can be used to identify problematic use of alcohol or drugs or other mental health issues. Typically, participants participate in a short standardized screening assessment to identify potential issues, followed by a brief intervention for pupils that need additional support. DPI indicates that coaching and technical assistance related to SBIRT were provided to 178 participants from 37 schools during the 2019-20 school year.

19. "Trauma sensitive schools" refers to a program consisting of self-guided training modules that train school staff to address behavioral or mental health challenges in pupils who have experienced trauma. The program was developed through a partnership between DPI and St. Amelian-Lakeside, a human services agency located in Milwaukee providing foster care placement, mental health services, and education. DPI indicates that in 2019-20, state funding supported 54 schools participating in professional development related to trauma sensitive schools in collaboration with the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools (WISH) Center. Additionally, DPI held a virtual learning course that included 241 participants, and offered continuing education for individuals training others under the program.

20. The youth mental health first aid program trains school district staff to recognize early

signs of depression or generalized anxiety disorder, provide initial help to a pupil experiencing a mental health crisis, and refer pupils to appropriate professional resources. DPI indicates that in 2019-20, 84 youth mental health first aid trainings were held throughout the state in collaboration with the WISH Center, and the number of statewide trainers was increased to 70.

21. AB 68/SB 111 would provide an additional \$500,000 GPR annually for mental health training, and require DPI to provide training to school district staff and the instructional staff of independent charter schools regarding social and emotional learning, in addition to the other types of training required under current law. This modification and additional funding was included in DPI's agency budget request. [Alternative C1]

22. In its agency budget request, DPI indicates that training in social and emotional learning could include training in compassion reliance for school staff, which covers the impact of stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue among educators; bullying prevention, including the creation of online training modules for schools; and restorative practices, which helps schools implement a behavioral program in which pupils who have engaged in inappropriate behavior must address the impact of their behavior on others and take responsibility. DPI indicates that of the additional funding requested, \$168,500 would be used for these additional trainings.

23. Of the remaining \$331,500 included in the request, \$201,500 would be used to provide additional support for the WISH Center to hire two additional regional coordinators, in addition to the four it current employs. In addition, \$30,000 would be used to provide virtual training under the youth mental health first aid program, and the remaining \$100,000 would expand the trauma sensitive schools program. DPI indicates that demand for the program exceeds the trainings that the Department is able to provide with the amount of funding currently available. The Committee could consider providing the additional funding for these expansions of the trainings required under current law. [Alternative C2]

## ALTERNATIVES

### A. Aid for Mental Health Staff

1. Provide an increase of \$22,500,000 in 2021-22 and \$24,000,000 in 2022-23 for the program, modify current law to include expenditures for any pupil services professional, and modify the program so that all districts, independent charter schools, and private choice schools could qualify for reimbursement of any expenditures made to employ, hire, or retain pupil services professionals.

ALT A1	Change to Base
GPR	\$46,500,000

2. Provide an increase of \$6,000,000 annually, which would increase the proration rate for the second tier of aid under current law.

<b>ALT A2</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$12,000,000

3. Take no action.

**B. School-Based Mental Health Services Grants**

1. Increase funding for school-based mental health collaboration grants by \$3,500,000 annually, and modify statutory language to allow applicants to partner with mental health providers, rather than requiring partnership with community mental health agencies as required under current law.

<b>ALT B1</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$7,000,000

2. Take no action.

**C. Mental Health and School Climate Training Programs**

1. Increase funding for school mental health training programs by \$500,000, and require that training be provided on social and emotional learning, in addition to the training required under current law.

<b>ALT C1</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$1,000,000

2. Provide \$331,500 annually to provide additional support for the WISH Center, and increased support for the trauma sensitive schools program and the youth mental health first aid training program required under current law.

<b>ALT C2</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
GPR	\$663,000

3. Take no action.

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