



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

School Mental Health Plan in the 2017-19 Wisconsin State Budget

The school mental health plan in the budget will expand and improve access to mental health services for school-age youth, both in school and the larger community. The plan was developed by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) with the assistance of mental health experts, providers and advocates, along with K-12 officials.

The need for this initiative is clear. An estimated one in five school-age children and youth struggle with mental health issues, and 80 percent of those students do not get professional help. Of the 1.4 million children in Wisconsin, it is estimated that 95,200 (7%) have serious mental health needs.

Most school districts in the state do not receive funding specifically to support programming aimed at identifying children and youth with mental health issues, or serving those in need. While a very small number of districts receive some targeted federal funds, there are currently no state funds available for this important work.

The plan will provide more than \$7 million for the following initiatives:

- A **categorical aid program** (\$3 million GPR, beginning in 2018-19) to support school district and independent charter schools in the provision and expansion of mental health services. The program will be used to hire School Social Workers throughout the state. It recognizes the vital role that School Social Workers play in addressing mental health needs in our schools and communities.

DPI focused on increasing the numbers of School Social Workers because it found that the ratio of pupils to Social Workers has increased at a much higher rate than the ratios for Counselors, Psychologists and Nurses. In addition, DPI noted that School Social Workers tend to be more collaborative when working with community-based professionals and families.

- New **community and school mental health collaboration grants** (\$3.25 million GPR, beginning in 2018-19) to school districts and independent charter schools for the purpose of collaborating with community health providers to provide mental health services to pupils. This may include co-locating community health clinics in schools and providing screening and intervention services. In Minnesota, school-linked mental health services have been particularly effective at reaching youth who have never accessed services.
- A new **mental health training support program** (\$420,000 GPR in each year of the biennium) to provide evidence-based strategies related to addressing mental health issues in schools to school district staff and instruction staff of independent charter schools. The state will include the following strategies: 1) screening, brief intervention, and referral for treatment; 2) trauma sensitive schools training modules; and 3) youth mental health first aid.