

SB 1302 (Portantino)

Pupil health: pupil wellness centers: grant program

PROBLEM

California students are facing a mental health crisis, but schools may not be adequately equipped to provide the necessary services. The past decade has seen a rise in mental health needs, partly due to unemployment and economic uncertainty, the growth of social media, and the prevalence of environmental calamities and natural disasters. These problems were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying remote learning and isolation.

Schools represent a crucial link through which students can access mental health services. However, teachers and administrators are overwhelmed and additional professionals are needed to meet the crisis. If left unaddressed, the implications will be felt for generations.

BACKGROUND

Students spend almost one-third of their lives at school, which has been termed the de facto mental health provider. In many cases, schools are the only access that students have to mental health services. If schools are unable to meet that need, students may not have other avenues of care.

Reports suggest that the majority of students are not currently receiving the care they need. More than 75% of principals stated that the emotional and mental health needs of students were a problem, and two-thirds of teachers said they were unequipped to deal with their students' mental health.

A 2020 report by the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Com-

mission found that one in three high school students reported feeling chronically sad and hopeless, with the number rising to more than half for LGBT students. One in six high school students reported having considered suicide in the past year, and one in three LGBT students. One in five students reported being harassed or bullied. These issues are especially dire for students of color, who already face disparities in chronic absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion.

Expanding wellness centers in California high schools would meet the growing need for mental health care among students. Meeting the mental health needs of California students is crucial to ensuring long-term wellbeing and academic success; unaddressed anxiety, depression, and trauma can impact future wellbeing and interpersonal relationships, academic achievement, and economic prosperity, as well as increasing demands on social and health care systems.

SUMMARY

SB 1302 would appropriate \$1,000,000,000 from an unspecified fund to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide annual grants of up to \$250,000 each to certain local educational agencies serving high school pupils to establish or improve pupil wellness centers to provide comprehensive medical and behavioral health services.

SB 1302 would require grant funds to be used for activities that will help pupils to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit in order to learn successfully, and would authorize grant funds to be used for personnel to support pupil health. The bill would require the State Department of

Education to identify criteria for the evaluation of applicants and the awarding of grants.

EXISTING LAW

Existing law requires the governing board of a school district to give diligent care to the health and physical development of pupils and authorizes the governing board of a school district to employ properly certified persons for this purpose. Existing law requires a school of a school district or a county office education and a charter school to notify pupils and parents or guardians of pupils no less than twice during the school year on how to initiate access to available pupil mental health services on campus or in the community, as provided.

SUPPORT

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