

HOUSE BILL NO. 385

INTRODUCED BY M. ROMANO, B. EDWARDS, J. ISALY, M. LEE, M. NIKOLAKAKOS, P. STRAND, J. SECKINGER, B. CLOSE, S. FYANT, J. WEBER, J. SOOKTIS, D. POWERS, M. CUNNINGHAM, E. TILLEMAN, M. BERTOGLIO, E. MATTHEWS, T. RUNNING WOLF, F. SMITH, R. MINER, G. OBLANDER, D. BAUM, B. CARTER, J. COHENOUR, D. HAWK, S. HOWELL, C. KEOGH, K. KORTUM, G. NIKOLAKAKOS, L. REKSTEN, E. STAFMAN, Z. ZEPHYR, M. MARLER, S. DEMAROIS, J. LYNCH, V. MOORE

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PILOT PROGRAM; PROVIDING THAT THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM; ESTABLISHING PROGRAM PARAMETERS; PROVIDING A DEFINITION; ESTABLISHING REPORTING REQUIREMENTS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**NEW SECTION. Section 1. School mental health promotion pilot program.** (1) There is a school mental health promotion pilot program administered by the office of public instruction. The purpose of the program is to encourage and support schools in implementing innovative, student-led, and locally determined mental health promotion initiatives.

(2) The office of public instruction shall solicit applications from school districts seeking to participate in the program and award grants to applicants displaying:

(a) a specific need to address mental health concerns among students of one or more schools of the district;

(b) that the application was developed and supported by:

(i) students;

(ii) parents;

(iii) certified and classified staff, administrators, and trustees of the school district; and

(iv) community members and organizations;

(c) an identification of and commitment to implement specific mental health promotion activities;

(d) plans to develop a program management team, including representatives from the groups listed under subsection (2)(b); and

(e) plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the program using specific metrics and establishing a baseline for those metrics prior to implementing mental health promotion activities under the program.

(3) (a) Contingent on and within appropriations for the program, the office of public instruction shall award grants to school districts displaying the greatest need, preparation, and promise of successfully implementing mental health promotion activities under the program. If possible, the office of public instruction shall award grants to districts in a manner that ensures diversity of district size and geography.

(b) The office of public instruction shall award annual grants to school districts ~~of not less than \$10,000 or more than the lesser of an amount equal to \$25 for each enrolled student in a participating school in the prior school year or \$50,000 in an amount that is not less than \$5,000 and is not more than the lesser of:~~

(i) \$25 for each student enrolled in a participating school in the prior school year; or

(ii) \$50,000.

(c) A school district awarded a grant must receive the grant for 2 years and may reapply for a second 2-year grant cycle.

(d) A school district receiving a grant under the program shall deposit the grant funds in the district's miscellaneous programs fund and use the grant funds only for the costs of implementing mental health promotion activities.

(4) (a) A school district receiving a grant under the program shall report to the office of public instruction by July 15 of even numbered years. The report must include the following:

(i) an accounting of expenditures of grant funds;

(ii) a summary of mental health promotion activities implemented under the grant; and

(iii) an evaluation of the effectiveness of the grant in improving the mental health of students in participating schools, including, if possible, the specific metrics under subsection (2)(e).

(b) The office of public instruction shall report, in accordance with 5-11-210, to the education interim committee a compilation of the reports received under subsection (4)(a) and an agency evaluation of the implementation of the program.

(5) As used in this section, the term "mental health promotion activities" means locally determined, developmentally appropriate activities that may occur in or out of school aimed at improving the mental health of the entire population of students at a school, decreasing stress, anxiety, and mental illness, and reducing the incidence of violence, bullying, substance use, and self-harm. The term may include but is not limited to:

- (a) modifications to the school schedule, such as later start times or block scheduling;
- (b) reconfiguring of the school to increase the feeling of community and students being known by peers and teachers;
- (c) programs to increase parent and family involvement;
- (d) intergenerational programs, such as foster grandparent programs or programs involving tribal elders;
- (e) reducing barriers to student access to individual or group counseling;
- (f) implementing schoolwide initiatives, especially initiatives recommended for elementary and secondary schools by the Montana suicide review team established in section 3, Chapter 353, Laws of 2013;
- (g) peer mentoring programs and mentor programs utilizing community members;
- (h) the use of creative arts and play;
- (i) service learning and other community-based projects; and
- (j) partnerships with youth development and empowerment organizations.

**NEW SECTION. Section 2. Appropriation.** (1) There is appropriated \$250,000 from the general fund to the office of public instruction in each year of the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, to be used for the distribution of grants under [section 1].

(2) The legislature intends that the appropriation in this section be considered part of the ongoing base for the next legislative session.

**NEW SECTION. Section 3. Notification to tribal governments.** The secretary of state shall send a copy of [this act] to each federally recognized tribal government in Montana.

**NEW SECTION. Section 4. Codification instruction.** [Section 1] is intended to be codified as an

**Amendment - 1st Reading-white - Requested by: Melissa Romano - (H) Education**

- 2025

69th Legislature 2025

Drafter: Laura Sankey Keip,

HB0385.001.001

1 integral part of Title 20, chapter 7, part 13, and the provisions of Title 20, chapter 7, part 13, apply to [section 1].

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3 NEW SECTION. **Section 5. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2025.

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5 NEW SECTION. **Section 6. Termination.** [Section 1] terminates June 30, 2029.

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