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Mental Health in Schools Update

By Tenzin Dadak

The issue of schools providing mental health services continues to gain attention both at the federal and state levels. In November, Congresswoman Barbara Lee reintroduced the Student Support Act, which aims to allocate \$100 million in grants to states to enhance school based mental health and student support providers (Oakland Post, 2023). Just last month, a bipartisan effort led by U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski and John Hickenlooper saw the Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support Act pass through the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee as a provision within another act. The legislation helps school districts design and establish peer-to-peer mental health programs in middle and high schools through necessary investments.

On the state level, legislators are stepping up to address this issue as well. In Pennsylvania, growing concerns about mental health have prompted lawmakers to introduce bills that are aimed at improving mental health support in schools. For example, Pennsylvania House Bill 1665 seeks to expand access to guidance counselors. Another proposed bill would allow students to take up to three excused mental health days (Jacobs, 2024). Additionally, Georgia and Colorado have established grant programs totaling \$15 million and \$12.3 million, respectively. These programs aim to allocate funds for the hiring of additional mental health professionals and school counselors (Stanford, 2023). Several other states have expanded telehealth services for the mental health needs of students. In Washington, Senate Bill 6216 establishes a statewide network that allows for smaller districts to tap into mental health resources that the otherwise would not be able to access (Thompson, 2024). The states that have taken steps to confront the student mental health crisis both have Republican and Democratic legislative majorities, which demonstrates the prioritization of this issue across party lines.

These developments in mental health support for students underscore a growing recognition of the importance of addressing mental health needs on the federal and state levels. While federal initiatives like the reintroduction of the Student Support Act and the Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support Act garner attention, it is interesting to observe the steps taken by states to address this issue. State and community led campaigns are leading the effort to establish mental health programs and other innovative solutions in schools.

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