Wisconsin invests in school-based mental health initiatives

Wisconsin’s recently enacted state budget includes money for schools to improve students’ access to mental health services. Gov. Scott Walker signed the budget bill (AB 64) into law in September. For the first time, Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers says, the state will provide funds for mental health training and partnerships between schools and community providers.

The state-funded training will provide school personnel with evidence-based strategies for addressing mental health issues in young people. Schools also will get more money to hire additional social workers. Lastly, a new state grant program will be available for schools that work with local mental-health professionals to improve student access to mental health services. Combined, these three initiatives will cost a total of $7 million, The (Appleton) Post-Crescent reports.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 20 percent of children between the ages of 13 and 18 have a serious mental illness. That includes anxiety, mood and behavior disorders, all of which often go untreated. Four years ago, the Wisconsin Legislature created an Office of Children’s Mental Health that focuses on policies to improve the delivery of mental health services among young people.