

Wisconsin Association of Family and Children's Agencies: Joint Finance Committee advances school-based mental health

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The Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies applauds the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) for their action this week to approve a new Medicaid-funded service in the 2017-19 Biennial Budget that will advance student well-being by promoting communication and consultation between students, parents, teachers and mental health professionals.

This new Medicaid funding is a critical component of a package of proposals advocated by the Coalition for Expanding School-Based Mental Health in Wisconsin, a broad coalition representing advocates, parents, mental health providers and schools across the state of Wisconsin. The Coalition actively promotes best practices in school-based mental health services and advocates for policies and funding to replicate these successes in schools across the state.

"There is a real opportunity here to build on the investments proposed in the Governor's budget to reach more schools and more students, especially those in rural and high-need districts," said Linda Hall, WAFCA Executive Director and a Coalition leader. "These investments are critical to sustaining successful programs and growing more opportunities to advance student mental health."

The JFC support for Medicaid-funded consultation unites with other state initiatives, such as the Fostering Futures initiative of First Lady Tonette Walker, which encourage all systems that touch our Wisconsin children and families to focus on trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches to healing – where the values of consistent and coordinated care are paramount.

“Consultation is not only respectful and necessary, we know that it improves treatment planning, so children feel better faster, their grades improve and they are more likely to graduate,” emphasized Hall.

Hall offered special thanks to Rep. Mike Rohrkaste and Sen. Alberta Darling for their leadership on this important initiative. “We look forward to their continued advocacy as additional elements of the Coalition’s proposal are considered in coming weeks, including raising the total annual grants available to schools to establish and enhance mental health services and give teachers more tools to respond to the mental health challenges of their students, creating a better teaching and learning environment for all.”