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SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*NOTE: This column is being submitted by Sen. Scott Fitzgerald for your consideration to print.*

## **Improving Students' Mental Health This School Year**

As August winds to a close, back-to-school preparations are in full swing for students, parents, and schools across the state. This year, 30 Wisconsin schools will see an addition to the annual curriculum with the launch of the Wisconsin School Mental Health Project, a five-year program aimed at improving Wisconsin students' emotional well-being and mental health. The program will join with the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Project and Wisconsin AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) as part of an effort to improve mental health services for students statewide.

The Wisconsin Department of Education estimates that one in five Wisconsin children are affected by a significant mental health issue that can negatively impact their daily life both at home and at school; less than one third of these students will receive the help that they need. That is why the Wisconsin School Mental Health Project will aim to train teams within schools and communities to recognize the signs of mental health issues, and develop policies and practices to support these students and improve their learning environment.

Goals of the program include fostering the emotional well-being of all students, detecting early warning signs of mental health challenges, providing effective support through school staff and community partners, and engaging families to create a supportive environment outside the classroom. Training opportunities will range from online modules to hands-on workshops.

Participating schools were divided into two groups, with 30 schools launching the program from 2015, and another 24 schools joining in 2016. Schools within the 13<sup>th</sup> Senate District involved in the first flight include Horicon Junior High School, Horicon Senior High School, and Van Brunt Elementary School. For additional project details and a full list of schools participating in the program, visit the Department of Public Instruction Website.

For students, families, and education staff whose schools are not enrolled in the program, the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center provides valuable resources including workshops and online courses on bullying, mental health in the classroom, school climate, and more. Visit <http://www.wishschools.org/> for all of these and links to additional resources.

*Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) represents the 13th Senate District, which covers portions of Dodge, Jefferson, Waukesha, Washington, Dane, and Columbia counties.*

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