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Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Salvo and Brownlee

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SUMMARY

- Establishes the Social Work Apprenticeship Retention and Training (SMART) Internship Program to support students and families and to help address nonacademic barriers to student success.
- Requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish SMART as a three-year pilot program to test strategies for strengthening the school-based social work workforce in underserved and high-need public schools.
- Requires the Chancellor to award a yearly grant of up to \$15,000 for no more than three academic years to eligible students to provide a paid and educationally meaningful internship experience at a qualifying school.
- Requires an eligible student awarded a grant to work at an internship for up to 20 hours a week and for no more than 30 weeks.
- Entitles the bill the “Ohio Students and Families Workforce Strengthening Act.”
- Appropriates \$1 million in each of FYs 2026 and 2027 to support the pilot program.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

SMART Internship Program

The bill establishes the Social Work Apprenticeship Retention and Training (SMART) Internship Program to support students and families and to help address nonacademic barriers to student success.

The bill requires the program to be evaluative in nature and is not intended to establish a permanent program without further action by the General Assembly, nor is it requiring or expanding the provision of clinical mental health treatment in schools.¹

Chancellor of Higher Education

The bill requires the Chancellor to establish the SMART Internship Program within 90 days after the bill's effective date and to:

1. Establish the program as a three-year pilot program to test strategies for strengthening the school-based social work workforce in underserved and high-need schools.
2. Beginning with the academic year that begins after the bill's effective date, award grants to eligible students to provide a paid and educationally meaningful internship experience at a school district, community school, STEM school, or educational service center (ESC) in which 50% of the students are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch and that agrees to employ an eligible student under the program.²
3. Award grants for three academic years, ensure that a grant does not exceed \$15,000 for each school year, and distribute the grant either:
 - a. At a rate of \$25 per hour that is paid on the same pay schedule offered to other licensed educators at the district, school, or ESC where the eligible student is working; or
 - b. Through a lump sum payment of up to \$15,000 that is paid at the end of the internship period for the corresponding school year.³
4. Provide grants to supervisors of up to \$250 for each eligible student the individual supervises.⁴
5. Adopt rules to administer the pilot program.⁵

Eligible students

The bill qualifies a student for a grant if the student is working towards obtaining an independent social worker or social worker license and is enrolled in, and in good standing at, a master's degree program at Bowling Green State University, Miami University, Ohio University, Wright State University, and Youngstown State University.⁶

¹ Section 1(B) of the bill.

² Section 1(A) and (B) of the bill.

³ Section 1(E).

⁴ Section 1(I).

⁵ Section 1(J).

⁶ Section 1(A).

The bill requires eligible students to apply to participate in the pilot program in a form and manner prescribed by the Chancellor.⁷

Requirements

Each eligible student awarded a grant must work at an internship for up to 20 hours a week for no more than 30 weeks.⁸

If the grant program or a student's internship is permanently terminated, and the student is no longer an eligible student, then:

1. For a student receiving the grant through the hourly rate, no further grant payments will be made to that individual as of the day the student no longer meets the requirements.
2. For a student receiving a grant through a lump sum payment, the student may receive a prorated amount of the lump sum that reflects the number of hours the student worked during the student's internship at a district, school, or ESC while being an eligible student.

If a student temporarily does not satisfy the requirements of being an eligible student, due to relocating to another district, school, or ESC or due to a leave of absence, then:

1. For a student receiving a grant through an hourly rate, the bill prohibits payments during the period in which the student does not meet the requirements. Payments must resume once the student again is an eligible student, but the payments cannot extend beyond 30 weeks from the student's internship start date.
2. For a student receiving a grant through a lump sum payment, the student remains eligible to receive the full grant amount if the student completes all of the program requirements.⁹

The bill permits each university in which an eligible student is enrolled to continue implementing any existing evaluation processes required as part of any certification licensing, or approval requirements associated with serving as a school-based social worker or student support professional.¹⁰

Each eligible student receiving a grant must submit to the Chancellor any evaluations the student receives while completing an internship at the district, school, or ESC. The Chancellor must use any evaluation received to determine an eligible student's continued eligibility for a grant and must notify the student if the Chancellor disqualifies a student for a grant based on the submitted evaluations.¹¹

⁷ Section 1(C).

⁸ Section 1(D).

⁹ Section 1(F).

¹⁰ Section 1(G).

¹¹ Section 1(H).

Reporting

The bill requires the Chancellor to submit the following reports to the House of Representatives and Senate's higher education standing committees:

1. An interim report upon completion of the second academic year of the pilot program's operation that focuses on:
 - a. Program participation;
 - b. Internship placements;
 - c. Early completion and retention trends;
 - d. Implementation challenges; and
 - e. Recommended program adjustments.
2. A final report upon pilot program completion that evaluates overall program effectiveness and includes recommendations regarding the continuation, expansion, modification, or future funding of the program.¹²

Under the bill, any required reporting must be limited to aggregate data only and to information that is reasonably available through program administration, participating universities, and districts, schools, and ESCs. Further, the bill prohibits the creation of new or duplicate data collection to fulfill the reporting requirements.

To the extent practicable, each report must include:

1. The number of students who applied to and participated in the program, disaggregated by university;
2. The number of students who successfully completed internships;
3. The number, type, and geographic distribution of districts, schools, and ESCs served;
4. A high-level, aggregate comparison of where participating students were enrolled versus the districts, schools, and ESCs or regions in which internships were completed;
5. Early and post-program workforce placement outcomes, to the extent available;
6. General categories of nonacademic supports provided to students and families;
7. Supervisor participation and feedback;
8. Workforce gaps addressed in underserved and high-need districts, schools, and ESCs;
9. Recommendations for program improvement or scalability.

The Chancellor may include any additional information related to the pilot program it determines is necessary to provide context in either the interim or final report.¹³

¹² Section 1(K).

¹³ Section 1(L).

Appropriation

The bill appropriates \$1 million in each of FY 2026 and FY 2027 for the Department of Behavioral Health, in collaboration with the Chancellor, to issue grants for the SMART Internship Pilot Program.¹⁴

Based on the amount of the appropriation made for the program and the number of applications the Chancellor receives, after the first year of the program, the bill permits the Chancellor to award grants to a new cohort of eligible students for subsequent years of the program or, instead, continue awarding grants to eligible students who are currently participating in the program, until the students complete their internships.¹⁵

The bill requires the Chancellor to cease awarding any new grants after the third academic year that occurs after the bill's effective date.¹⁶

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	03-31-26

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¹⁴ Sections 2, 3, and 4.

¹⁵ Section 1(M).

¹⁶ Section 1(N).