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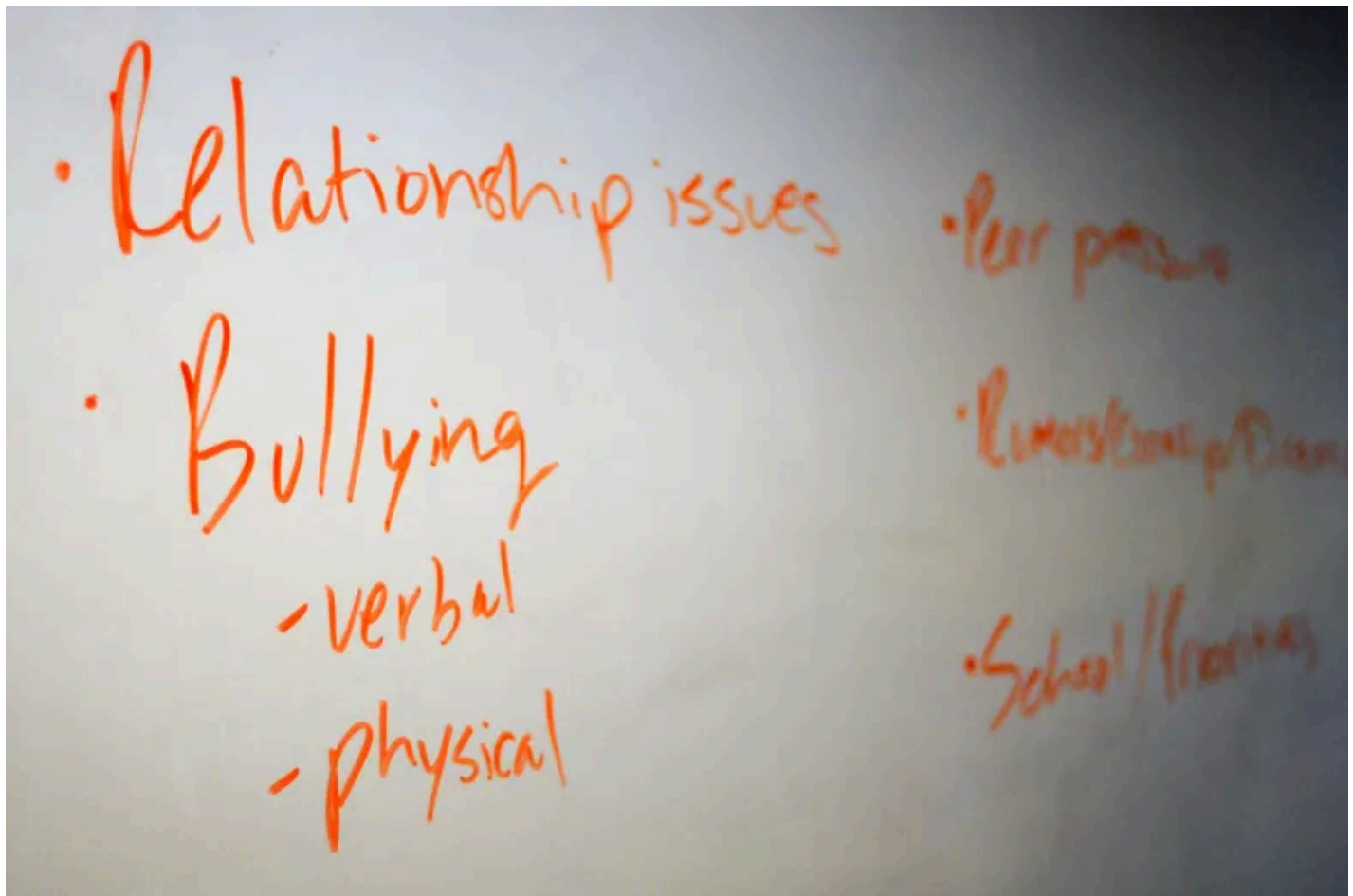
Bangor

Letter: Students need more support

by **Opinion Contributor**

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In this Nov. 15, 2018 photo, the board in a classroom is shown with key words during a Youth Aware of Mental Health session at Uplift Hampton Preparatory School in Dallas. Credit: Benny Snyder / AP

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Maine communities are rallying around concerning trends in our public schools, but despite good intentions, many efforts have fallen short. As a behavioral health clinician consulting across the state, I see firsthand the impact of **over one-third** of adolescents reporting symptoms of mental illness during a time when tens of thousands of Maine residents are forced **to wait** six to 12 months for mental health services. Students without access to mental health services may struggle to develop essential life skills: problem solving, rule-following, communication, and emotion regulation. However, we can turn this around with three strategic approaches.

First, support the An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Work Licensing (**LD 1298**). This straightforward, low-cost solution directly addresses our workforce shortage and I believe it is the only behavioral health workforce bill with realistic passage prospects this session. It could immediately expand our pool of qualified school mental health providers.

Second, establish cross-community task forces that bring together educators, police, and mental health and substance use providers for monthly collaboration. When these sectors work in isolation, students fall through cracks. Coordinated approaches ensure consistent support and shared accountability across all touch points in a young person's life.

Third, develop wraparound clinics on school properties to address systemic family concerns at their source. Rather than waiting for crises that require youth to leave their home and community (e.g. to out-of-state for residential care or to Long Creek), we can provide preventive, accessible services where families already gather.

These solutions recognize that thriving students need comprehensive community support. By investing in workforce development, cross-sector collaboration, and accessible service delivery, we can transform our schools from a focus on crisis management into environments where all students succeed.

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