
Education Committee

HB 1900

Brief Description: Defining the role of the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Johnson, Orwall, Muri, Lytton, Tarleton, Pollet and Bergquist.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Finds that students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning, development, and success in school.
- Specifies that the primary role of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists is to focus on student mental health, work with at-risk and marginalized students, perform risk assessments, and collaborate with mental health professionals, in addition to the counselors' work developing and delivering guidance curriculum and psychologists' work delivering testing.

Hearing Date: 2/9/15

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

School counselors, social workers, and psychologists are certificated instructional staff (CIS), often collectively referred to as educational staff associates. As it does for other CIS, it is the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) that establishes the policies and practices for the approval of programs of courses, requirements, and other activities leading to certification, establishes policies and practices for the approval of the character of work required to be performed as a condition of entrance to and graduation from any educational staff associate preparation program, and establishes a list of accredited institutions of higher education whose graduates may be awarded certificates as educational staff associates.

Neither the term "school social worker" nor "school psychologist" is defined in the school code. "School counselor" was defined in statute in 2007, as a professional educator who holds a valid

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school counselor certification, with a purpose and role to plan, organize, and deliver a comprehensive school guidance and counseling program that personalizes education and supports, promotes, and enhances the academic, personal, social, and career development of all students, based on the National Standards for School Counseling Programs of the American School Counselor Association.

With the passage of ESHB 1336 in 2013, mental health needs of students were highlighted and new certification and training requirements were put in place. School counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses must complete a training program of at least three hours in youth suicide screening and referral as a condition of certification by the PESB. Content standards for the training are adopted by the PESB in consultation with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Department of Health (DOH). The PESB must consider training programs on the Best Practices Registry of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. The training requirement applies to continuing or professional certificates if the certificates are first issued or renewed on or after July 1, 2015.

In addition:

- As part of the course on Issues of Abuse, the PESB was tasked with incorporating standards for recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students, including indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide. To be initially certified after August 31, 2014, educators must complete the expanded course.
- Each Educational Service District was required to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training on youth suicide screening and referral, and on recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students. Training may be offered on a fee-for-service basis or at no cost if funds are available.
- Dependent upon funds appropriated for this purpose, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was directed to provide funds for mental health first-aid training targeted at teachers and educational staff. The DSHS must collaborate with the OSPI to identify methods of instruction that leverage local resources in order to make the training broadly available.
- Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, each school district was required to adopt a plan for recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students (Plan), and annually provide the Plan to all district staff.
- The OSPI was directed to convene a task force to identify best practices, model programs, and successful strategies for school districts to develop partnerships with community agencies to coordinate and improve support for youth in need.

Summary of Bill:

Findings and Intent.

Findings are made that students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning, development, and success in school and that the need to identify and assist students struggling with emotional and mental health needs has reached a serious level statewide. It is further found that the persons most qualified in the school setting to lead the effort in addressing this issue are the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist.

School Counselors, Social Workers, and Psychologists.

The primary role of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists is to focus on student mental health, work with at-risk and marginalized students, perform risk assessments, and collaborate with mental health professionals. The majority of the time spent by these school professionals should be in direct student contact, specifically identifying, collaborating, and intervening to meet the mental health needs of all students.

In addition, school counselors work with developing and delivering a guidance curriculum, and school psychologists deliver testing. In order to allow school counselors and psychologists adequate time to focus on the priorities, responsibilities such as data monitoring and data input should be handled by nonlicensed, noncertified staff when possible.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 2/04/15.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.