

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2381

As Passed House:
February 15, 2016

Title: An act relating to creating a task force on school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

Brief Description: Convening a task force on school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Ortiz-Self, Kilduff, Walsh, Peterson, Gregerson, Cody, Caldier, Jinkins, Reykdal, Frame, Stanford, Sells, McBride, Bergquist and Pollet).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/19/16, 1/28/16 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/15/16, 58-39.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Professional Educator Standard Board to convene a 10-member task force on school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.
- Specifies appointment provisions for members of the task force.
- Charges the task force with reviewing: (1) the projected need of school districts for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers; (2) the capacity of the state for meeting this need; (3) alternative certification routes for school counselors and social workers; and (4) school counselor, psychologist, and social worker preparation programs.
- Directs the task force to report on its findings and recommendations by December 1, 2016.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Ortiz-Self, Vice Chair; Magendanz,

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Ranking Minority Member; Stambaugh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Calder, Griffey, S. Hunt, Kilduff, Klippert, Kuderer, Orwall, Pollet, Rossetti and Springer.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove and Hayes.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative McCaslin.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

School counselors, psychologists, and social workers are certificated instructional staff (CIS), and are often collectively referred to as Educational Staff Associates (ESA). Qualified applicants for an ESA certificate can anticipate two levels of certification during their career: (1) a first-level regular certificate, and (2) an advanced-level regular certificate.

As it does for other CIS, the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) establishes the policies and practices for the approval of programs of courses, requirements, and other activities leading to certification. The PESB also 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 ESA preparation program. The PESB also establishes a list of accredited institutions of higher education whose graduates may be awarded ESA certificates.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The PESB must convene and staff a 10-member task force on school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. The task force is charged reviewing the following issues:

- the projected need of school districts for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers;
- the current capacity of the state for meeting this need;
- alternative certification routes for school counselors and social workers; and
- school counselor, psychologist, and social worker preparation programs to determine whether professionals completing these programs have the proper preparation to respond to the mental health and safety needs of students, and to provide students with necessary social and emotional supports.

The members of the task force are to be appointed as follows:

- the President of the Senate must appoint one member from the Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives must appoint one member from the Education Committee. These appointees must be from different political parties;
- the Governor must appoint one member representing school counselor, psychologist, and social worker preparation programs;
- the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must appoint one member representing the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction;
- the PESB must appoint one member representing the PESB; and

- the PESB must appoint one member each from associations representing: school counselors; school psychologists; school social workers; educators; and principals. These appointments must be from lists of candidates provided by the associations.

The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the Legislature, the PESB, the SPI, and the Governor by December 1, 2016.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) We are in an era where high-stakes testing is being reviewed, and hopefully moved away from, to an area we need to examine: social and emotional supports for children. Mental health issues arising for students, including suicide-related needs for children as young as elementary students. In order to ensure that children's academic needs are being met, Washington needs to make sure that children have the mental health and supports to succeed. Suicide and acts of violence are becoming more common, as suicide is the number one killer of children, and something must be done. Counselors, social workers, and psychologists are in the front row to provide services to children that spend eight hours a day in class. Washington needs to make sure that it has the capacity to meet the needs for these professions and the children they support.

Professionals need to be prepared to handle the health and safety needs of students to provide the necessary social and emotional support. The timing for the task force established in the bill is ideal, as the PESB is currently examining accreditation options for counselor/educator programs. There is a need for providing emotional and social support for our children, and this bill will help. This legislation should be used to determine how many counselors, psychologists and social workers are needed, how they are produced, and what the gap is. With the information that this bill will generate, policymakers and stakeholders can examine ways to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students by providing enough professional support staff to meet the demand.

The bill should be amended to address technical issues, including who appoints members of the task force, (the PESB should appoint their own representatives as should the professional associations), and which types of ESAs are involved. It is a good time to examine whether we have enough ESAs in the school setting, as they are an integral part of the success of students.

The issues associated with counselors, psychologists, social workers, and student needs are complex, and a task force is a better approach than simply establishing policy. It would be helpful to have someone from the mental health community, someone with clinical expertise, participate on the panel. The staff of the PESB is dedicated to the task force and a null and void clause would be appreciated.

Increasing student support for addressing mental health issues, academic counseling, and drug and alcohol issues are a top issue for Washington school principals. This bill is a logical step towards addressing these issues.

The current prototypical funding model funds one social worker per 40,000 students, regardless of the need. Tukwila School District uses local money to fund three social workers for their 3,000 students, but students and staff tell the district that these staffing levels are insufficient to meet the basic social and emotional needs of students, and to allow them to achieve their potential. The task force should include representatives of the school directors and school administrators associations. The task force should also include representation from school districts with high need for social and emotional support and college and career counselors. The recommendations from the task force should include the basis on which to allocate the social and emotional support staff and the college and career counselors.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) School nurses should be included in this bill, as their work overlaps significantly with counselors and social workers. About one-third of a school nurse's day is spent doing behavior health work, and this is well within the scope of practice for registered nurses. Most schools in Washington are small and rural, and many of those school districts do not have counselors. Even in districts of all sizes, only a handful have social workers. In most settings, school psychologists are there only to provide services to students that qualify for special education. In well-resourced districts, school nurses are an integral part of the student support team, but in many schools they are the only provider of mental health services.

Much of the health care reforms have focused on integrating physical and mental health. These intersections should be examined at the school level. School nurses have significant mental health training. The duties of counselors, psychologists, social workers, and school nurses are often conflated, and policymakers need to better understand the distinct service that they provide and how they work together for the health of kids.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Amy Brackenbury, Washington School of Counselors Association; Bob Cooper, National Association of Social Workers Washington Chapter; David Brenna, Professional Educator Standards Board; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principals; and Dave Larson, Tukwila School District.

(Other) Lynn Nelson and Mary Clogston, School Nurses Organization of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.