

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6480

As of February 5, 2020

Title: An act relating to developing comprehensive school counseling programs.

Brief Description: Developing comprehensive school counseling programs.

Sponsors: Senators Mullet and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/05/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires school districts to develop and implement a written plan for a comprehensive school counseling program by the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, subject to appropriated funds.
- Requires school counselors to implement the plan and spend at least 80 percent of their work time providing direct and indirect services to students.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

Background: School counselors develop and lead comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that focus on the academic, career, personal, and social needs of all students. Along with school psychologists and school social workers, school counselors are involved in multitiered systems of support for academic and behavioral skills. Together, this group also focuses on student mental health, works with at-risk and marginalized students, performs risk assessments, and collaborates with mental health professionals to promote student achievement and create a safe learning environment. State law encourages, where possible, responsibilities such as data input and tracking to be handled by non-licensed, non-certified staff to provide time for counselors to prioritize activities requiring direct student contact.

Summary of Bill: Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purpose, each school district must develop and implement a written plan for a comprehensive school counseling program by the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. The school

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counseling program must be based on regularly updated standards developed by a national organization representing school counselors.

Written Plan. The written plan must:

- define school counselor competencies, student mindset and behavior standards for learning, and school counselor ethics standards;
- establish a comprehensive school counseling program that uses state and nationally recognized counselor frameworks and is systemically aligned to state learning standards;
- provide a process for identifying student needs through a multilevel school data review and analysis that includes, at a minimum, use-of-time data; program results data; and data regarding communication with administrators, parents, students, and stakeholders;
- explain how direct and indirect services will be delivered through the comprehensive school counseling program; and
- establish an annual review and assessment process for the comprehensive school counseling program that includes building administrators and stakeholders.

Plan Implementation. The written plan must be implemented by school counselors, who must spend at least 80 percent of their work time providing direct and indirect services to benefit students. The remainder of work time must be spent on school counseling program support that consists of professional development, lesson plan development, and data analysis.

Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students that help students improve achievement, attendance, and discipline. Examples include instruction, appraisal, advisement, and counseling. Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselor's interactions with others. Examples include collaboration, consultation, and referrals.

Guidance and Transition. By December 1, 2020, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction must develop and distribute, in collaboration with a nonprofit organization that represents school directors, policy guidance for school districts regarding developing and implementing a written plan.

Prior to the 2021-22 school year, each school district board of directors must, within existing funds, develop a transition plan for developing and implementing the comprehensive school counseling program plan.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2020.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The goal for 2021 is to make a large investment in school counselor resources. This sets that up by directing OSPI to look at national models, overlay those models with state learning standards, and create a system for school districts. Most of the time counselors are not counseling, they are doing clerical work. Given that counselors have masters degrees, this does not make fiscal sense. We need to reiterate and focus on what counselors should be doing. The state has designated graduation requirements to align with student skills, and this adds complexity. Counselors are uniquely trained to provide this guidance, but are instead pulled into duties that do not call on their expertise. In a recent survey of counselors, more than 80 percent answered "no" when asked if they were able to adequately attend to mental health in addition to other duties. First generation students rely more on school staff to learn about college, and this proposal is an important step forward to creating more access to opportunity by ensuring school counselors have time to guide these students.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Mark Mullet, Prime Sponsor; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Libuse Binder, Executive Director, Stand For Children; Steve Smith, Executive Director, Black Education Strategy Roundtable; Grant Hosford, Board Member, Foundation for Tacoma Students; Mohamed Farah, Bridging Cultural Gaps; Amy Brackenbury, Washington School Counselors Association; Jenny Morgan, Washington School Counselors Association; Regina Brown, Washington School Counselors Association; Megan LaPalm, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.