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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5369**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Orwall, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Liias, Nobles, Valdez, and C. Wilson)

AN ACT Relating to enhancing youth mental health and well-being through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools; amending RCW 28A.410.044, 28A.320.280, and 28A.310.235; and adding new sections to chapter 28A.310 RCW.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.310 RCW to read as follows:

The legislature finds that Washington youth require additional support in order to thrive. Washington has the ninth highest school refusal rate in the country, with 30 percent of K-12 students missing more than 10 percent of the school year. A significant number of Washington's youth experience high rates of emotional, developmental, or behavioral distress, or thoughts of suicide.

The legislature further finds that school social workers are uniquely positioned to contribute to K-12 student safety, address student behavioral health care needs, and support students with individualized education programs. School social workers collaborate with school personnel, families, and community organizations to reduce absenteeism, support student mental health, address systemic inequalities, and create inclusive learning environments that prepare students for success in a diverse society. School social workers promote social and economic justice and are an integral part of the mental health continuum of care in the school setting.

The legislature further finds that the national association of school social workers recommends a ratio of one school social worker to every 250 students, but that Washington has only one school social worker for every 3,798 students. Washington would need to increase this ratio by 93 percent to meet the national standard.

It is therefore the intent of the legislature to increase student access to school social workers through workforce development and collaboration with community organizations and accredited university programs.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.410.044 and 2018 c 200 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A school psychologist is a professional educator who holds a valid school psychologist certification as defined by the professional educator standards board. Pursuant to the national association of school psychologists' model for comprehensive and integrated school psychological services, school psychologists deliver services across ten domains of practice. Two domains permeate all areas of service delivery: Data-based decision making; and consultation and collaboration. Five domains encompass direct and indirect services to children and their families: Student-level services, interventions, and instructional supports to develop academic skills; student-level interventions and mental health services to develop social and life skills; systems-level school-wide practices to promote learning; systems-level preventive and responsive services; and systems-level family school collaboration services. The three foundational domains include: Knowledge and skills related to diversity in development and learning; research and program evaluation; and legal and ethical practice.

(2)(a) A school social worker is a professional in the fields of social work and education who holds a valid school social worker certification as defined by the professional educator standards board. The purpose and role of the school social worker is to ((~~provide an integral~~)) serve as a link between school, home, and community ((~~in~~)), helping students achieve academic and social success. This is accomplished by removing barriers and providing services that may include: Mental health ((~~and academic counseling, support for students and parents, crisis prevention and intervention, professional case management, collaboration with other professionals, organizations, and community agencies, and advocacy for students and parents. School social workers work directly with school administrators as well as students and families, at various levels and as part of an interdisciplinary team in the educational system, including at the building, district, and state level. School social workers provide leadership and professional expertise regarding the formation of school discipline policies and procedures, and through school-based mental health services, crisis management, the implementation of social-emotional learning, and other support services that impact student academic and social-emotional success. School social workers also facilitate community involvement in the schools while advocating for student success~~)) counseling; crisis intervention; behavioral consultation; trauma-informed care; suicide risk assessment, management, and treatment; support and advocacy for students and families; professional case management; and developing and implementing individualized education programs and plans developed under section 504 of the federal rehabilitation act of 1973.

(b) School social workers provide leadership and professional expertise in the development of school discipline policies and procedures, emphasizing best practices. School social workers also leverage data to track trends, monitor student progress, and assess the effectiveness of interventions. As trained mental health clinicians, school social workers support implementation of social-emotional learning and foster supportive school environments for all students.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.320.280 and 2018 c 200 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

The school counselor works with developing and leading a comprehensive guidance and counseling program to focus on the academic, career, personal, and social needs of all students. School psychologists carry out special education evaluation duties, among other things. School social workers ((~~promote and support students' health, academic, and social success with counseling and support, and by providing and coordinating specialized services and resources~~)) have the role and scope explicated in RCW 28A.410.044(2). All of these professionals are also involved in multitiered systems of support for academic and behavioral skills. These professionals focus on student mental health, work with at-risk and marginalized students, perform risk assessments, and collaborate with mental health professionals to promote student achievement and create a safe learning environment. In order that school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists have the time available to prioritize these functions, in addition to other activities requiring direct student contact, responsibilities such as data input and data tracking should be handled by nonlicensed, noncertified staff, where possible.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.310 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, each educational service district may coordinate with:

(a) Local mental health agencies and local school districts to arrange for in-school placements of social worker associates licensed under RCW 18.225.145 and to coordinate clinical supervision for approved supervisors that meet the requirements as defined in rule by the department of health to provide the necessary supervision to the social worker associates;

(b) Local school districts and accredited university programs to support masters of social work candidates in obtaining an in-school placement and a conditional educational staff associate certificate as provided by the professional educator standards board; and

(c) Local school districts, accredited university programs, and behavioral health agencies to support postmasters of social work professionals in obtaining an in-school placement. These positions must be coordinated between the educational service district and behavioral health agencies.

(2) The Washington professional educator standards board shall adopt rules to implement this section, including conditions for the placement of social worker associates licensed under RCW 18.225.145 and graduate students enrolled in a master of social work program at an accredited college or university in a public school setting.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.310.235 and 2019 c 295 s 102 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) For the purpose of this section, "educator" means a paraeducator, teacher, principal, administrator, superintendent, school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, school nurse, school physical therapist, school occupational therapist, or school speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

(2) An educational service district may employ a person whose duties are to provide to local school districts the following services related to educator recruitment:

(a) Serve as a liaison between local school districts and educator preparation programs, between their region and other regions in the state, and between the local school districts and agencies that may be helpful in educator recruitment efforts, including the office of the superintendent of public instruction, the Washington professional educator standards board, the paraeducator board, the student achievement council, the state board for community and technical colleges, the state department of veterans affairs, the state military department, and the workforce training and education coordinating board;

(b) Encourage and support local school districts to develop or expand a recruiting Washington teachers program under RCW 28A.415.370, a career and technical education careers in education program, or an alternative route teacher certification program under chapter 28A.660 RCW;

(c) Provide outreach to community members who may be interested in becoming educators, including high school and college students, subject matter experts, and former military personnel and their spouses;

(d) Support persons interested in becoming educators by providing resources and assistance with navigating transition points on the path to a career in education; ((~~and~~))

(e) Provide resources and technical assistance to local school districts on best hiring processes and practices; and

(f) Support the coordination efforts prescribed under section 4 of this act.

(3) A person employed to provide the services described in subsection (2) of this section must be reflective of, and have an understanding of, the local community.

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