

BILL TITLE: School Psychologists, School Counselors and School Social Workers Are Essential to Student Success

A BILL concerning the shortage of qualified school psychologists, school counselors and school social workers in public schools.

Please contact us for more information:

Amy Henry, M.S.

Board Chair, Oregon School Counseling Association

oscapresident@oscainc.org

Danielle Pappas, PhD, NCSP

President, Oregon School Psychologists Association

orpresident.ospa@gmail.com

Mary Stevens-Krogh, LCSW, LSSW

Representative of the Oregon School Social Workers Association

mkrogh@pps.net

SEC. 1: FINDINGS

The state legislature finds that:

- (a) Oregon ranks last in the nation for youth mental health needs.
- (b) Over sixty percent of youth with depression do not receive treatment.
- (c) More than one-third of youth who receive mental health services, receive it in schools.
- (d) Youth from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds are more likely to receive mental health services at school.
- (e) Students with disabilities experience significantly higher rates of mental and behavioral health needs and disciplinary exclusions from school.
- (f) School counselors, school psychologists and school social workers have specialized training in providing school based mental health services and are part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs, consistent with 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 [the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* and 20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 [the *Every Student Succeeds Act*].
- (g) School psychologists have specialized training in providing school based mental health services to students with disabilities.
- (h) School counselors, school psychologists and school social workers provide unique services, are an integral part of the school team, and support student learning, mental health and behavior to help students achieve academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally.
- (i) The National Association of School Counselors (ASCA) and the National Association of School Social Workers (SSWA) recommend a maximum ratio of 250 students per school counselor and school social worker. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a maximum ratio of 500 to students per school psychologists. This ratio is consistent with research showing that school psychological services decrease as ratios of students to school psychologists increase (Eklund et al., 2017; 2020).

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- (j) There is a significant shortage of school counselors and school psychologists in Oregon, with a ratio of 1:340 for school counselors and 1:1,448 for school psychologists.
- (k) High student ratios impact the recruitment and retention of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers including candidates from diverse backgrounds.
- (l) A shortage of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers across the state of Oregon jeopardizes the state's ability to provide essential services and support to students, schools, and communities and to prioritize specialized and inclusive services to students with disabilities.
- (m) Targeted strategies to address financial tuition barriers are needed to address shortages.
- (n) School counselors require a minimum of a two year Master degree, school social workers require a minimum of a one year Master degree and school psychologists require a minimum three year specialist level degree to sufficiently prepare for the provision of comprehensive and high quality services to students.
- (o) Data indicates that shortages of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers will persist into the future.

SEC. 2: PURPOSES

- (a) To address the shortage of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers in Oregon state.
- (b) To address the shortage of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers in the higher education pipeline.
- (c) To improve the academic, behavioral, and social emotional well-being of children and youth by increasing access to high quality school-employed mental and behavioral health professionals.
- (d) To ensure the state fulfills its obligations to state and federal laws that address students with disabilities, school safety, school climate and social and emotional learning.

SEC. 3: DEFINITIONS

- (a) **School psychologist:** a credentialed professional, with the title of "school psychologist" who is a uniquely qualified member of a school team that supports student and teacher success by:
 - 1. Applying expertise in mental health, learning and behavior to help students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally;
 - 2. Partnering with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.
- (b) **School Counselor:** School counselors are highly educated, professionally certified individuals who help students succeed in school and plan their career by:
 - 1. Helping students form healthy goals, mindsets and behaviors through the delivery of a comprehensive school counseling skill-based program.
 - 2. With the support of a school counselor, students learn to develop effective collaboration and cooperation skills, to practice perseverance, to develop time management and study skills, and to learn self-motivation and self-direction habits.
- (c) **School Social Worker:** as a licensed specialist who is the link between school and community in providing services to students, families and school personnel to promote and support students' academic and social success. This can include:
 - 1. Providing crisis intervention and developing intervention strategies to increase academic success.
 - 2. Supporting conflict resolution, anger management and overall development of social- emotional skills.
 - 3. Work with parents to facilitate support in their children's school adjustment.
 - 4. Alleviate family stress for the child to function more effectively in school.

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5. Obtain and coordinate community resources to meet students' needs.
6. Coordinate systems of care to provide wrap-around services.

(b) **High-needs district:** A high-needs district is a district that fails to meet the ratio of employing one school counselor and school social worker for every 250 students and one school psychologist for every 500 students **AND** has an enrollment of at least thirty percent of focal combined underserved students.

Rule of Construction: All definitions in this Act apply only to the programs authorized therein.

SEC. 4: WORKFORCE DATA

- (a) The SEA shall conduct an annual collection of data on the number of school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists (i.e., professionals providing school counseling, school psychological, and school social work services under the professional title of “school counselor”, “school psychologist” and “school social worker”) who are employed:
 1. full-time by a school or district,
 2. part-time by a school or district,
 3. by an outside organization and providing services in a school or district, or
 4. as a full or part-time contract employee providing services in a school or district.
- (b) Data shall be:
 1. used to inform the SEA regarding high needs districts;
 2. used to inform SEA decision making regarding the effective use of state funds to recruit, train, and retain school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers
 3. used to help identify and target funding needs;
 4. made publicly available on the state department of education website; and
 5. reported annually to the state legislature.
 6. included in the development of the statewide data system for educator workforce

SEC. 5: TUITION SERVICE OBLIGATION GRANT IN HIGH NEEDS DISTRICTS

(a) The Department of Education shall provide grant funding beginning July 1, 2025 to increase school counselor, school psychologist and school social work services in high needs districts.

(b) High needs districts are eligible to apply for tuition service obligation grant funds for up to each 250 full time equivalent students for employment of full-time school counselor and school social workers and 500 full time equivalent students for employment of full-time school psychologists.

1. Districts who are awarded grant funds must establish progress in lowering school counselor, school psychologist, and school social worker student ratios to be eligible for subsequent year grant funds.

(c) Districts shall use money granted to pay for school psychology, school counseling, and school social work education debt according to the following:

1. Pay the applicable creditor or designated person of the school counseling, school psychology and school social worker Master or Specialist level education debt in full on behalf of the school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker
2. Within 30 days after disbursement of money to the applicable creditor or designated person, district shall report to the department of education the following:
 - (i) The date the payment was sent to the applicable creditor or designated person.

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(ii) The amount of the payment.

(iii) The name and address of the applicable creditor or designated person.

(iv) The names of the school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker whose education debt was paid by the district with the grant money.

(v) The initial date of employment for each school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker who receives payment of education debt and the departure from employment date, if applicable.

(d) Receipt.--A written or electronic receipt of payment of education debt shall be issued to the school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker employed by the district whose education debt was paid by a grant under this act.

SEC. 6: GRANT AWARDS

(a) In order to receive a payment of education debt, a school counselor, school psychologist or school social worker must:

1. Commit to working a minimum of three years in the Oregon high needs district that provides the grant money to pay for education debt.
2. Be licensed to practice as a school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker in Oregon.
3. Begin work within six months of accepting a position with the district paying for the education debt.
4. Be employed as a full-time school counselor, school psychologist or school social worker for the district providing the grant.

(b) High needs district application for grant eligibility. Applications shall:

1. Be submitted by a district to the department in a manner the department deems appropriate.
2. Be available electronically.
3. Include documentation as deemed necessary by the department.
4. Certification.--A district shall certify in good faith that the information provided in the application and all supporting documents and forms are true and accurate in all material aspects.

(c) The Department of Education shall award grants on a competitive basis, taking into consideration:

1. The priorities to be addressed by moneys received by a school district or an educator network, including efforts related to:
 - a. Increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers hired; and
 - b. Reflecting the demographics of the students of the school district or school districts within the educator network with the demographics of the school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers of the school district or school districts within the educator network ; and
 - c. Addressing the most significant service shortages through innovative strategies including grow your own programs; and
 - d. Implementing ASCA, SWAA and NASP practice models for school counselor and school psychologist services
2. Whether the school district is a small school district or serves a rural community

(d) The following shall apply to the disbursement of grants:

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1. The department shall select an appropriate number of high needs districts who are eligible to receive grants under this act each calendar year, dependent upon the amount of money appropriated for the program by the General Assembly.
2. No later than 60 days after a district's submission or resubmission of an application, the department shall approve or deny a district's application for grant eligibility.
3. The department shall provide a notice to the district that: the application for grant eligibility is approved up to an amount determined by the department; or the application for a grant is denied. The department shall provide its reasons for denial of the application. The district may resubmit its application based upon the department's reasons for denying the application.
4. The department shall disburse grant money up to the approved amount to high needs districts whose grant applications are approved each calendar year until the amount of money appropriated for the program by the General Assembly has been fully allocated.
5. The department will publish all grant awards on the school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker educator workforce webpage, including amount allocated to each high needs district, use of funds, and impact on district school psychologist, school counselor, and school social worker student ratios and shortages.

SEC. 7: STATE EDUCATION FUNDING METHODOLOGY

- (a) Updates to Oregon's education funding methodology will include 1 unit for each 250 full time equivalent students for employment of full-time school counselors and social workers and 500 full time equivalent students for employment of full-time school psychologists.
- (b) Each unit is based on the annual cost to employ a full time school counselor, school psychologist and school social worker.
- (c) Each pupil counted in establishing a unit for school psychological service may be counted only once in a district.
- (d) Funds appropriated by this unit shall be used for employment of full-time licensed school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers.
- (e) School psychologists shall be required to provide services aligned with the NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services.
- (f) Any full units must be used in the school that generated the unit. Any remaining fractional units must be combined into full units if possible and used to further increase the amount of school psychological services available. Any fractional units still remaining after that may be used at the discretion of the district for school psychological services.
- (g) The Department of Education shall promulgate rules and regulations to implement and enforce this chapter.