H-1813.1

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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1900**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** House Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Ortiz-Self, Johnson, Orwall, Muri, Lytton, Tarleton, Pollet, and Bergquist)

AN ACT Relating to defining the role of the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist; adding new sections to chapter 28A.320 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.410 RCW; and creating new sections.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning and development, and ultimately student success in school. The legislature further finds that the need to identify and assist students struggling with emotional and mental health needs has reached a serious level statewide. In order to prioritize students' needs first, the legislature finds that the persons most qualified in the school setting to lead the effort in addressing this epidemic are the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist.

(2) The legislature further finds that in chapter 175, Laws of 2007, appropriate acknowledgment was given to the fact that a professional school counselor is not just a course and career guidance professional, but a certificated educator with unique qualifications and skills to address all students' academic, personal, social, and career development needs, and that school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement by supporting a safe learning environment and addressing the needs of all students through prevention and intervention programs that are part of a comprehensive school counseling program. The legislature finds, however, that despite the language in RCW 28A.410.043 that appropriately recognizes that the role of the school counselor is multifaceted, with a focus upon students' mental health needs as well as career guidance needs, the reality in the schools is that counselor staffing levels are well below the national recommendations of one counselor to every two hundred fifty students. As a result, there are not enough counselors in the schools and many school counselors have been tasked primarily with course and career guidance responsibilities at the expense of the mental health side of school counseling. Similarly, school psychologist staffing levels are below the national recommendations of one psychologist to every five hundred to seven hundred students when providing comprehensive school psychological services, and school social worker staffing levels are below the national recommendations of one school social worker to every two hundred fifty students, or one to every fifty students with intensive needs.

(3) The legislature further finds that school counselors, social workers, and psychologists interact with students on a daily basis, thus putting them in a good position to recognize the signs of emotional or behavioral distress and make appropriate referrals. The legislature further finds that they need ongoing professional development to address students' mental health needs and get students the help they need. The legislature further finds that Engrossed Substitute House Bill No. 1336, which became chapter 197, Laws of 2013, increased the capacity of school districts and their personnel to recognize and respond to youth in need through comprehensive planning and additional training, but that additional opportunities for collaboration on a regular and ongoing basis are in order. By providing monthly professional collaboration opportunities with local mental health service providers at the school district level to school counselors, social workers, and psychologists, the legislature intends to take the next step toward enabling these professionals to recognize and respond with skill and confidence to the signs of emotional or behavioral distress that they observe in students and make the appropriate referrals to evidence-based behavioral health services.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

A 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 to promote student achievement and create a safe learning environment. The majority of a school counselor's, social worker's, or psychologist's time should be spent in direct student contact, which should include: Identifying, collaborating, and intervening to meet the mental health needs of all students.

The school counselor also 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 also carry out special education evaluation duties, among other things. School social workers also promote and support students' health, academic, and social success with counseling and support, and by providing and coordinating specialized services and resources. All of these professionals are also involved in multitiered systems of support for academic and behavioral skills. In order that school counselors, social workers, and 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.410 RCW 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 school social worker is a professional educator 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 link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic and social success. This is accomplished by providing services that include: 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, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, and through mental health intervention, crisis management and support services as part of an interdisciplinary team, to help students succeed. School social workers also facilitate community involvement in the schools while advocating for student success.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, on a monthly basis throughout each school year, first‑class school districts must provide a minimum of one hour of professional collaboration, preferably in person, for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists that focuses on the following: Recognizing signs of emotional or behavioral distress in students, including but not limited to indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide, screening, accessing current resources, and making appropriate referrals. School districts that have mental health centers in their area shall collaborate with local licensed mental health service providers under chapter 71.24 RCW. Those districts without a mental health center in their area shall collaborate via telephone or other remote means that allow for dialogue and discussion. By collaborating with local providers in this manner, educational staff associates get to collaborate in short but regular segments, in their own schools or near school district facilities, and school districts are not put in a position that they must obtain substitutes. This local connection will also help foster a connection between school personnel and the mental health professionals in the community to whom school personnel may make referrals, in line with the legislative intent expressed throughout Engrossed Substitute House Bill No. 1336, chapter 197, Laws of 2013, to form partnerships with qualified health, mental health, and social services agencies in the community to coordinate and improve support for youth in need and the directive to the department of social and health services with respect to the provision of funds for mental health first-aid training targeted at teachers and educational staff.

(2) Second-class districts are encouraged, but not required, to collaborate and provide the professional collaboration as provided in subsection (1) of this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act does not create any civil liability on the part of the state or any state agency, officer, employee, agent, political subdivision, or school district.

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