AN ACT Relating to developing comprehensive school counseling programs; adding new sections to chapter 28A.320 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) The legislature recognizes that certificated school counselors are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors play a critical role in maximizing K-12 student outcomes, including those related to attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation, postsecondary readiness, and social-emotional development. The legislature finds that school counselors play an especially unique role in the lives of students from underserved backgrounds, particularly students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, and students living in poverty, who, according to research, are more likely to seek out their school counselor for academic, mental health, or postsecondary planning needs.

(2) The legislature also recognizes research indicating that lower counselor to student ratios enable counselors to work more closely with students and address their unique needs, and that school counselors should be able to use their time to provide direct and
indirect services to students as described in a comprehensive school counseling program grounded in research.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

By the beginning of the 2022-23 school year each school district shall develop and implement a written plan for a comprehensive school counseling program that is based on regularly updated standards developed by a national organization representing school counselors.
The written plan must:
(1) Define school counselor competencies, student mindset and behavior standards for learning, and school counselor ethics standards;
(2) Establish a comprehensive school counseling program that uses state and nationally recognized counselor frameworks and is systemically aligned to state learning standards;
(3) 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;
(4) Explain how direct and indirect services will be delivered through the comprehensive school counseling program; and
(5) Establish an annual review and assessment process for the comprehensive school counseling program that includes building administrators and stakeholders.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:
(1) The comprehensive school counseling program plan required under section 2 of this act must be implemented by school counselors to guide students in academic pursuits, career planning, and social and emotional learning.
(2) When implementing the plan, school counselors shall spend at least 80 percent of their work time providing direct and indirect services to benefit students, as aligned with standards developed by a national organization representing school counselors. The remainder of work time shall be spent on school counseling program support activities that consist of professional development, lesson plan development, and data analysis.
(3) For purposes of this section:

(a) "Direct services" are in-person interactions between school counselors and students that help students improve achievement, attendance, and discipline. Examples include, but are not limited to, instruction, appraisal, advisement, and counseling.

(b) "Indirect services" are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselor's interactions with others, which allow school counselors to enhance student achievement and promote equity and access for all students. Examples include, but are not limited to, collaboration, consultation, and referrals.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

(1) By December 1, 2021, the office of the superintendent of public instruction must develop and distribute to school districts policy guidance regarding implementation of sections 2 and 3 of this act, developed in collaboration with a nonprofit organization that represents school directors.

(2) Prior to the 2022-23 school year, each school district board of directors must, within existing funds, develop a transition plan for developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program plan.

(3) This section expires June 30, 2023.

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