SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 5369

As of January 27, 2025

Title: An act relating to enhancing youth mental health and well-being through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools.

Brief Description: Enhancing youth mental health and well-being through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools.

Sponsors: Senators Orwall, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Liias, Nobles, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/29/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Amends the statutory definition of school social worker.
- Grants authority for educational service districts to coordinate with local mental health agencies and universities to arrange for in-school placements of licensed social worker associates and masters of social work candidates.
- Adds social worker allocations for high poverty schools in the amount of 0.060 per school type to the prototypical school model.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

Background: Educational Service Districts. Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are regional agencies intended to provide cooperative services to local school districts, the Washington Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth, and the Washington State School for the Blind; and assist the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. There are nine ESDs, each serving a different geographic region of the

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

state.

School Social Workers. "School social worker" is defined in current law as a professional in the fields of social work and education who holds a valid school social worker certification as established by the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB). The statutory definition also lists services that school social workers may perform.

A first-time applicant for the educational staff associate (ESA) certificate for school social workers must:

- hold a master's degree in social work;
- submit fingerprints for a background check; and
- show verification of a PESB-approved ESA course or any state's approved program leading to school social worker certification or three years of out-of-state experience in the school social worker role.

An individual who does not hold a full certificate may apply for a conditional ESA certificate, which is valid for two years or less. An applicant for a conditional ESA certificate for school social workers must:

- hold a bachelor's degree;
- be enrolled in a master's degree program for social work or social welfare; and
- submit fingerprints for a background check.

Social Worker Associates. The Department of Health licenses social worker associates. State law provides that social worker associates must have graduated from an accredited master's or doctoral degree program in social work, work under the supervision of an approved supervisor, and disclose to each client or patient that they are a social worker associate.

Prototypical School Model. The state's public school funding model allocates funding to school districts based on assumed levels of staff and other resources necessary to support a prototypical school serving an assumed number of students at defined elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The structure of the formula, which appears in statute, provides allocations for classroom teachers at an assumed class size, plus other building-level staff. The minimum allocation for social workers in current law is 0.311 in elementary school, 0.088 in middle school, and 0.127 in high school.

Summary of Bill: Amending the Definition of School Social Workers. The statutory definition of school social worker is revised to list certain services that may be performed by school social workers including behavioral consultation, professional case management, implementing individualized education programs, developing school discipline policies, and supporting implementation of social-emotional learning.

Placing Social Workers in Schools. Educational service districts are authorized to coordinate with:

- local mental health agencies and school districts to arrange for in-school placements of social worker associates and coordinate the required clinical supervision for those associates;
- local school districts and accredited university programs to support masters of social work candidates to obtain in-school placements and conditional educational staff associate certificates; and
- local school districts, accredited university programs, and behavioral health agencies to support postmasters of social work professionals in obtaining an in-school placement. The positions must be coordinated between the educational service district and behavioral health agencies.

Increasing Social Worker Allocations in the Prototypical Model. The prototypical school model is revised to increase social worker allocations by 0.060 per school type in high-poverty schools. High-poverty schools are those in which the three-year rolling average of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals is 50 percent or more of the school's enrollment, or schools that met the free or reduced-price meal criteria in the year immediately preceding their participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2025.

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

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