
SENATE BILL 5126

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senators Nobles and Cortes; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Prefiled 12/31/24.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing a statewide network for student
2 mental and behavioral health to maintain, expand, and provide
3 oversight to Washington's school-based mental and behavioral health
4 system for children and adolescents across the state; adding new
5 sections to chapter 28A.300 RCW; adding a new section to chapter
6 28A.310 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes that many
9 children and students struggle with mental health, substance use, and
10 behavioral health challenges that impact their ability to engage in
11 learning and develop pathways to wellness and success. The mental and
12 behavioral health crisis for children and youth in the United States
13 has reached a critical point. The legislature also recognizes that
14 behavioral health and wellness supports for K-12 students in
15 Washington are fragmented, with roles and responsibilities assigned
16 across several local and state agencies. The department of health,
17 the Washington state health care authority, and the office of the
18 superintendent of public instruction all play significant but
19 distinct roles, as do regional educational service districts, local
20 school districts, and community partners. Nonetheless, schools are
21 often community hubs making them a natural setting for prevention,

1 early intervention, and service delivery related to mental and
2 behavioral health so that students can fully access their right to a
3 basic education.

4 The legislature also recognizes the investments made to support
5 student behavioral health and well-being and that despite those
6 investments, school districts lack the dedicated funding and
7 coordinated supports necessary to deploy comprehensive supports and
8 direct services across the behavioral health continuum for their
9 students.

10 Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to create a
11 connected statewide network for student mental and behavioral health
12 to maintain, expand, and provide oversight to Washington's school-
13 based mental and behavioral health system for children and
14 adolescents across the state.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.300
16 RCW to read as follows:

17 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
18 specific purpose, the office of the superintendent of public
19 instruction, in collaboration with local education agencies, the
20 Washington association of educational service districts, and other
21 state agencies as applicable, including the health care authority,
22 the department of health, and the department of children, youth, and
23 families, shall (a) establish strategic direction and goals for
24 statewide programming to strengthen the capacity of local education
25 agencies to meet the recognition, initial screening, and response
26 requirements outlined in RCW 28A.320.127 and (b) provide state-level
27 coordination to help schools better promote mental well-being as well
28 as identify and connect students to behavioral health supports in
29 school and interconnected community settings.

30 (2) At a minimum, the state-level coordination and strategic
31 direction and goals mandated in subsection (1) of this section must
32 include:

33 (a) In alignment with the Washington integrated student supports
34 protocol, tools, guidance, and supports for school districts to offer
35 coordinated student supports related to behavioral health, including
36 prevention and awareness, student engagement, and student access to
37 the full continuum of school-based behavioral health services;

38 (b) Guidance and streamline processes to maximize access to state
39 and federal resources;

1 (c) Coordination with training and technical assistance entities
2 who support local education agencies in designing, funding, and
3 implementing comprehensive student behavioral health supports based
4 on the tools, guidance, and supports established in (a) of this
5 subsection;

6 (d) Evidence-based practices, including practices aligned with
7 the Washington integrated student supports protocol that support
8 mental and behavioral health services in school districts;

9 (e) Coordination with organizations representing school board
10 members, district and building-level leadership, educators, and other
11 school staff to support school district implementation of chapter
12 129, Laws of 2021;

13 (f) Support of local education agencies through guidance and
14 technical assistance in facilitating student access to mental and
15 behavioral health supports and reduction of barriers to school-based
16 behavioral health services;

17 (g) Resources to support local education agencies in deploying
18 student school-based substance use and behavioral health screening,
19 intervention, and referral activities in alignment to promising and
20 evidence-based practices;

21 (h) Foundational school substance abuse prevention and
22 intervention resources to address the health and well-being impacts
23 of drug use, including education to promote behaviors that positively
24 influence student behavioral health; and

25 (i) A review process for continuous improvement of services and
26 monitoring of the impact and alignment of statewide efforts related
27 to student behavioral health, including the regional school safety
28 centers established in RCW 28A.310.510 and the regional school-based
29 mental and behavioral health student assistance program established
30 in section 3 of this act.

31 (3) Subject to funds appropriated, the office of the
32 superintendent of public instruction shall support and implement
33 elements from the strategic plan developed by the strategic plan
34 advisory group established by section 1, chapter 76, Laws of 2022.

35 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.310
36 RCW to read as follows:

37 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
38 specific purpose, the regional school-based mental and behavioral
39 health student assistance program is established. The purpose of the

1 program is to support the office of the superintendent of public
2 instruction through increased regional deployment of behavioral and
3 mental health supports, including substance abuse prevention and
4 intervention services in communities with limited access to
5 behavioral and mental health services across Washington state. The
6 Washington association of educational service districts shall provide
7 overall coordination of the program across the regions.

8 (2) At a minimum, each regional program must:

9 (a) Work in conjunction with the office of the superintendent of
10 public instruction as prescribed in section 2 of this act and
11 permitted under RCW 28A.310.470 to form a statewide network for
12 student mental and behavioral health;

13 (b) Provide aligned student behavioral health assistance
14 prevention and intervention services in schools by:

15 (i) Supporting multidisciplinary school teams for referral and
16 systems improvement coordination;

17 (ii) Conducting screening, referral, and care coordination
18 activities;

19 (iii) Conducting internal capacity and fidelity assessments to
20 support systems improvement and continued sustained implementation
21 efforts at the local education agency level;

22 (iv) Providing individual and group intervention services using
23 evidence-based practices;

24 (v) Delivering and supporting the local education agency in
25 adoption and development of mental health and substance use classroom
26 education inclusive of prevention topics, such as opiates, vaping,
27 and mental health promotion;

28 (vi) Supporting behavioral health awareness campaigns;

29 (vii) Providing and/or supporting parent and community learning
30 events; and

31 (viii) Providing behavioral health treatment services in regions
32 where available;

33 (c) Support school districts in providing direct student
34 screening in both mental health and substance abuse;

35 (d) Collaborate as necessary and appropriate with regional school
36 safety centers required by RCW 28A.310.510 by sharing information and
37 student assistance resources to ensure alignment of behavioral health
38 supports across the region; and

39 (e) Support behavioral health career pathways through hiring new
40 nonlicensed staff who receive training, supervision, and internship

1 opportunities to explore career pathways in behavioral health. For
2 educational service districts that are licensed as behavioral health
3 agencies this may include hiring licensure candidates and licensed
4 staff that would like to pursue a career in school-based behavioral
5 health.

6 (3) Educational service districts that are licensed as behavioral
7 health agencies may pilot the integration of telehealth services and
8 provide in-person treatment services to support students in need of
9 more focused mental health treatment support.

10 (4) The Washington association of education service districts
11 shall support the regional programs by:

12 (a) Establishing consistent criteria for school participation in
13 the program;

14 (b) Establishing an overall evaluation and reporting of program
15 outcomes from across the regions;

16 (c) Engaging with regional programs and providers in the
17 administration of validated capacity assessments to measure action
18 plans for the ability to sustain implementation efforts;

19 (d) Supporting the office of the superintendent of public
20 instruction in coordinating statewide data collection and progress
21 monitoring; and

22 (e) Submitting an annual report to the office of the
23 superintendent of public instruction summarizing:

24 (i) Services provided by each regional program;

25 (ii) Other related mental and behavioral health services provided
26 by each educational service district, including fees for service
27 schedules; and

28 (iii) Barriers and opportunities for deployment of behavioral and
29 mental health supports including, but not limited to, student
30 impacts, local workforce needs, and other recommendations to support
31 greater state-level coordination.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.300
33 RCW to read as follows:

34 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
35 specific purpose, the office of the superintendent of public
36 instruction shall establish a grant program to support school
37 districts in developing and implementing a plan for recognition,
38 screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in
39 students as required by RCW 28A.320.127.

1 (2) To the greatest extent possible, the office of the
2 superintendent of public instruction shall pair grantees with the
3 state and regional support structures established in sections 2 and 3
4 of this act, the state school safety center established in RCW
5 28A.300.630, and the regional school safety centers established in
6 RCW 28A.310.510 to support local education agency planning, connect
7 local education agency staff to effective training and technical
8 assistance, and ensure community-center implementation.

9 (3) Funds may be used to support training, develop model school
10 safety policies and procedures, and identify and implement best
11 practices in school-based mental and behavioral health.

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