

Date of Hearing: March 13, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 396 (Eggman) – As Introduced February 6, 2019

SUBJECT: School employees: School Social Worker Pilot Program

SUMMARY: Establishes a pilot program to fund social workers at each eligible elementary or middle school site in a school district or charter school in five counties for five years.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the School Social Worker Pilot Program and, subject to an appropriation for this purpose, requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to provide a multiyear grant award to one school district or charter school in each of the Counties of Alameda, Riverside, San Benito, San Joaquin, and Shasta, to fund a social worker at each eligible school site for five years beginning with the 2021-22 school year through 2025-26.
- 2) Authorizes a school district or the governing body of a charter school within these five counties to apply for a grant established pursuant to this section.
- 3) Requires CDE to develop an application process and criteria for determining grant recipients on a competitive basis with priority given to school districts and charter schools with higher pupil dropout and absenteeism rates, and a higher percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils.
- 4) Defines the following terms for the purposes of this section:
 - a) “Eligible school” means a school offering instruction in kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 8, that meets both of the following:
 - i. The school has higher pupil dropout and absenteeism rates than the state average, as determined by CDE.
 - ii. The school has a higher percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils than the state average, as determined by CDE.
 - b) “Social worker” means a person holding a services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services specializing in social work, pursuant to Section 44266, or a state-licensed social worker supervised in their school-based activities by an individual holding a services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services or a professional services credential with a specialization in administrative services.
 - c) “Socioeconomically disadvantaged pupil” means a pupil who meets at least one of the following conditions:
 - i. Neither of the pupil’s parents have received a high school diploma.

- ii. The pupil is eligible for free or reduced-price meals or has a direct certification for a free or reduced-price meal program.
 - iii. The pupil is a migrant child, homeless child or youth, or foster youth. Migrant child means a “currently migratory child,” as defined in Section 54441.
- 5) Requires each governing board of a school district and governing body of a charter school, receiving a grant under this pilot program, to report to the CDE, and requires CDE to report to the Legislature by January 1, 2027, regarding changes in pupil outcomes at schools participating in the pilot program, including both of the following:
 - a) Changes in chronic absenteeism.
 - b) Changes in rates of suspension and expulsion.
- 6) Specifies that the act is inoperative on July 1, 2027, and, as of January 1, 2028, is repealed.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Expresses the intent of the Legislature that the governing board of each school district and each county superintendent of schools maintain fundamental school health services at a level that is adequate to accomplish all of the following: preserve pupils’ ability to learn, fulfill existing state requirements and policies regarding pupils’ health, and contain health care costs through preventive programs and education (EC 49427).
- 2) Requires the governing board of a school district to give diligent care to the health and physical development of pupils, and authorizes the district to employ properly certified persons for the work (EC 49400).
- 3) Specifies that the minimum requirements for the services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services are a baccalaureate degree or higher degree from an approved institution, a fifth year of study, and any specialized and professional preparation that the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) requires. The services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services authorizes the holder to perform, at all grade levels, the pupil personnel service approved by the commission as designated on the credential, which may include, but need not be limited to, school counseling, school psychology, child welfare and attendance services, and school social work (EC 44266).
- 2) Requires a school to include in its School Accountability Report Card, the availability of qualified personnel to provide counseling and other pupil support services, including the ratio of academic counselors per pupil (EC 33126).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown**COMMENTS:**

Need for the bill. According to the author: “Over six million California children attend public school and estimates indicate that 50% of California children will experience psycho-social

issues. Data from Prevention and Early Intervention studies show that childhood is the most effective time to introduce interventions that promote mental wellness, and that these interventions can significantly decrease or resolve behavioral health issues when implemented early. Schools provide an ideal backdrop for mental health professionals to administer screenings and assessments, deliver treatment, link to community resources, and arrange case management. Research shows that behavioral health interventions may be just as effective when implemented in the scholastic setting by school social workers as they are when implemented in the clinical context. Research indicates school social workers implementing key behavioral health interventions on campus can lead to decreases in behaviors that result in office referrals, detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and finds a positive correlation to student performance, increased attendance, and a positive influence on school climate and culture.”

Incidence of mental health and behavioral health issues for children and youth. A 2014 UCLA Policy Brief notes that nearly half of all Americans will need mental health treatment some time during their lifetimes, with initial symptoms frequently occurring in childhood or adolescence. According to a report by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), *Mental Health Needs of Children and Youth*, up to 20 percent of children in the United States experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder every year.

Research suggests that numerous factors contribute to the incidence of mental health disorders including living in persistent poverty, which often leads to increased exposure to stressors and trauma. Other factors linked with an increased likelihood of mental health problems, according to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, include children in fair or poor health, and children with a parent who had mental health needs or a physical disability. They also report that boys were nearly twice as likely as girls to have mental health needs.

Importance of prevention and early intervention. Research suggests that nearly half of all children with emotional or behavioral health difficulties receive no mental health services. Among the few children and youth who do receive mental health services, most do so at school. One study found that 70.8 percent of California children identified with mental health needs through a statewide survey did not receive treatment.

Mental health problems that are not addressed early in life can inflict severe consequences including serious difficulties at home, with peers, and in school; a higher risk for dropping out of school; and increased risk of engaging in substance use, criminal behavior, and other risk-taking behaviors.

Barriers to seeking treatment for mental and behavioral health disorders. Studies cite a lack of insurance coverage as one of the barriers to children and youth receiving mental health services. However, as mental health and substance abuse services were deemed to be an essential health benefit under the Affordable Care Act, this may be somewhat mitigated. Additional barriers to accessing mental health services include parents with limited English proficiency – 88.6 percent of children whose parents had limited English proficiency did not receive any mental health treatment compared to 66.6 percent of children with English proficient parents. Other barriers include the complexity of the care system, the inadequate linguistic capacity of existing professional services and resources, as well as the stigmas and cultural barriers to recognizing and seeking treatment for mental health problems.

School-based and school-linked mental health services for pupils. Across the country, school systems are increasingly joining forces with community health, mental health, and social service

agencies to promote student well-being and to prevent and treat mental health disorders. Because children spend more time in school than in community mental health centers, schools are well positioned to link students with mental health services.

Mental health services that are provided in schools may include counseling, brief interventions to address behavior problems, assessments and referrals to other systems. Providing mental health services in a school-based setting helps address barriers to learning and provide supports so that all students can achieve in school and ultimately in life. Schools are also places where prevention and early intervention activities can occur in a non-stigmatizing environment.

Schools offering comprehensive mental health programs rely on partnerships with community systems, such as community mental health centers, hospitals, and universities. Schools, working with their community partners, can collect prevalence data to build a foundation to plan, develop, and implement comprehensive mental health programs and services through strong school-community partnerships.

California lags in providing social emotional support to pupils. According to CDE data for 2016-17, there were 5,932 school psychologists and 687 social workers employed in California schools. The Packard Foundation, citing 2015 data, notes that the ratio for school psychologists is 1,265 to 1 and for social workers is 12,870 to 1.

29 percent of California school districts have no counseling programs at all. When counseling programs exist, counselors are often asked to add administrative duties such as testing, supervising, and class scheduling. The ratio of students per counselor in this state averages 945 to 1, compared to the national average of 477 to 1, ranking California last in the nation.

Clearly, California lacks sufficient numbers of trained personnel in our schools to meet the social and emotional needs of over six million pupils.

Defining social workers. This bill requires that social workers employed by school districts hold a services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services or a state-licensed social worker supervised in their school-based activities by an individual holding a services credential with a specialization in pupil personnel services or a professional services credential with a specialization in administrative services.

The Education Code requires that community-based mental health professionals be supervised in their school-based activities by an individual possessing a pupil personnel services credential or administrative credential. The term “supervised” in this context means that the credential holder has oversight of the school-based activities undertaken by a community-based mental health provider for the purpose of ensuring that these services are consistent with the needs of students served and are coordinated with other student services to allow for the provision of an efficient and comprehensive Pupil Personnel Services Program.

Defining a school’s eligibility for funding. This bill requires that CDE, in awarding grant funding to schools to fund social workers at school sites, give priority to those schools with a higher than average dropout and absenteeism rates, as well as those with a higher percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils. This are defined as those students meeting any one of the following: parents without a high school diploma; eligible for free or reduce price meals; or is a migrant, homeless, or foster child or youth.

In order to clarify this process, ***Committee staff recommend that the bill be amended*** to direct CDE to give priority to those schools with a higher than average dropout and absenteeism rates as well as a higher than average count of unduplicated pupils as defined for purposes of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), namely pupils who (1) are English learners, (2) meet income or categorical eligibility requirements for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program, or (3) are foster youth. “Unduplicated count” means that each pupil is counted only once even if the pupil meets more than one of these criteria.

Measuring outcomes. The bill requires schools to report to CDE, and CDE to report to the Legislature, at the conclusion of the pilot program and no later than January 1, 2027, the impacts of the School Social Worker Pilot Program on students in the participating schools. These metrics are to include both of the following:

- Changes in chronic absenteeism
- Changes in rates of suspension and expulsion

Committee staff recommend that the bill be amended to also include one or more measures to capture changes in one or more academic outcomes, to be determined by the CDE.

Prior and related legislation. AB 8 (Chu) of this Session requires schools to have one mental health professional for every 600 pupils accessible on campus during school hours, and for schools of less than 600 pupils, to employ at least one mental health professional for one or more schools or enter into an agreement with a county agency or community-based organization to provide mental health services to pupils. This bill is pending before this Committee.

AB 258 (Jones-Sawyer) of this Session establishes the School-Based Pupil Support Services Program Act, to provide grants to local educational agencies for increasing the presence of school health professionals at school sites and providing programs that prevent and reduce substance abuse among pupils. The source of the state funding for the grants awarded under the program would be an appropriation from the Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Account established pursuant to the Control, Regulate and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act (Proposition 64). This bill is pending before this Committee.

AB 2022 (Chu) Chapter 484, Statutes of 2018, requires each school of a school district or county office of education and charter schools to notify students and parents or guardians of pupils, at least twice per school year, how to initiate access to available student mental health services on campus or in the community.

AB 2471 (Thurmond) of the 2017-18 Session, would have required the transfer of funds from the Youth, Education, Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Account established through the passage of the Control, Regulate and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act to the CDE to establish a grant program which would allow schools to provide in-school support services to pupils. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2498 (Eggman) of the 2017-18 Session would have established the School Social Worker Pilot Program to provide multiyear grants to school districts in specified counties to fund a social worker at each eligible school. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Civil Liberties Union of California
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter

Opposition

None on file

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