

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Patrick O'Donnell, Chair

SB 451 (Lara) – As Amended April 29, 2015

SENATE VOTE: 32-0

SUBJECT: Student instruction and services: educational counseling.

SUMMARY: Revises requirements for school counseling programs in school districts which have chosen to provide comprehensive educational counseling programs. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) States legislative intent that school counselors perform specified functions and services, including: engaging and advocating for all students; implementing programs to promote student academic, career, and personal growth; promoting a safe learning environment; using research-based strategies to reduce stigma, conflict, and bullying; and providing support services for students who are English learners, eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or foster youth, including enhancing equity and access to the education system and community services.
- 2) Expands the definition of academic counseling to include counseling in understanding the relationship between academic achievement and career success, the value of career technical education and career readiness, and postsecondary options.
- 3) States that educational counseling may also include:
 - a) individualized review of the academic and department records, and the academic and career goals and opportunities, of a student.
 - b) the opportunity for a counselor to meet with each student and his or her parents or guardians to discuss the academic and department records of the student, and his or her educational and career options.
 - c) identifying students who are at risk of not graduating or having sufficient training to allow them to fully engage in their chosen career.
 - d) developing a list of coursework and experience necessary to assist middle and high school students to meet academic goals such as passage of the high school exit exam or its successor, graduation requirements, and higher education admission requirements, and a list for students for continuing education for students who fail to meet graduation requirements
 - e) informing each student who has failed to pass one or both parts of the high school exit examination, or its successor, of the option of intensive instruction and services
 - f) offering an individual conference with each 10th and 12th grade student who is not meeting academic targets or career goals and providing the student and his or her parent or guardian: information on programs, courses, and career technical education options;

information on the academic progress of the student; information on remediation strategies, high school courses, and alternative education options available to the student; and information on postsecondary education and training and the availability of financial aid

- 4) Requires ongoing professional development related to career and vocational counseling to include strategies for students pursuing postsecondary, career technical education, multiple pathway, college, and global career opportunities.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes school districts to provide a comprehensive educational counseling program for all students that include academic counseling, career and vocational counseling, personal and social counseling.
- 2) Defines educational counseling to mean specialized services provided by a school counselor possessing a valid Student Personnel Services credential issued by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed non-fiscal by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. The author's office states, "Research has demonstrated, most recently in a 2014 UC Irvine study, that higher numbers of counselors in K-12 schools is strongly associated with higher ratios of college enrollment, among other improved student outcomes.

As California aims to improve its education system and is implementing the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), counselors can play a critical role in addressing equity challenges and meeting the eight state priorities outlined in the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), which include school climate, high school graduation rates, and access to college preparation courses, among others."

In 2010-11 California had the worst counselor-to-student ratio in the country. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one counselor for every 250 students. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that as of 2010-2011 the national average was one counselor for every 471 students, and that California had one counselor for every 1,016 students, the worst ratio in the country.

School counseling workforce reduced by one fifth during the recession. A 2012 EdSource report examining the number of school counselors in the state's 30 largest districts found that the number of counselors in those districts was 21% lower than pre-recession levels. The report also found that few districts issued preliminary layoff notices to counselors in significant numbers in 2012-13, indicating that the reductions have stabilized.

California Standards for the School Counseling Profession. In 2009 the California Association of School Counselors issued a set of standards for the school counseling profession. These standards were intended to address a number of problems resulting from unclear expectations of school counselors, including counseling time being diverted to administrative tasks, poor quality

evaluations due to absence of an evaluation specific to school counseling, and poorly structured and incoherent counseling programs. The report noted that, “without clear standards of practice for school counseling, student support programs and services often become a jumble of disconnected services and random acts of guidance.” The provisions of this bill are intended to mirror this set of standards, with updates related to reflect the LCFF and LCAP, and other recent policy, such a restorative justice and positive behavior interventions.

Updating and aligning school counseling with LCAP priorities. Current law requirements for school counseling date to 1987, and do not reflect a number of changes in education policy, including school finance, accountability, discrimination and safety, and college and career readiness. This bill attempts to update counseling statutes by updating them in a number of areas, including referencing elements of the eight state priority areas including of the Local Control Accountability Plans.

Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling eliminated by LCFF. The 2006-2007 Budget Act provided \$200 million in ongoing funds to support additional counseling services for students in grades 7-12, and a related trailer bill AB 1802 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 79, Statutes of 2006, established the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling program to provide additional counseling services to students in grades seven to twelve. School districts were eligible to apply for this funding to support counseling services and to reduce the counselor-to-student ratios. This program became subject to categorical flexibility in 2009, and was eventually eliminated in the transition to LCFF.

Prior legislation. SB 272 (Wiggins) of the 2009-10 Session, was substantially similar to this bill. SB 272 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger, who stated:

“School district governing boards already have the authority to include the specified program requirements within its comprehensive educational counseling program. Nothing under current law prohibits a district from doing so. As a result, this bill is unnecessary.”

AB 722 (Corbett), Chapter 250, Statutes of 2001, required the California Department of Education to conduct a study to determine the proper ratios of student-to-school counselors necessary to maintain adequate student support services.

AB 1802 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 79, Statutes of 2006, established the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling program to provide additional counseling services to students in grades seven to twelve.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of School Counselors
California Association for the Gifted
Santa Clara County Office of Education
California State PTA
California Teachers Association
Los Angeles County Office of Education

Opposition

None on file

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