

SB 2340

Testimony in Opposition

Dear Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Diane Crowston and my experience as a school counselor for 39 years leads me to believe this bill is not the answer to address the shortage of school counselors in North Dakota. In reviewing the testimony from the Senate I was struck by the fact that no one addressed the most important question; why aren't more people going into school and community counseling? Several people in support of this bill feel that the counselor to student ratio is at fault although that was implemented in 2010-11 in grades 7-12 and there is no penalty for school districts not meeting these expectations. Your first step should be to discover why the shortage exists and an excellent resource is the leadership of the **North Dakota School Counselors Association**.

Does it really make sense to move mental health professionals from agencies where there is also a shortage and put them a work situation for which they aren't trained? Each group has its own specialized course work and scope of practice. Besides providing mental health counseling for **some** students, school counselors provide **ALL STUDENTS** with classroom guidance in social emotional topics, study skills, and career development. Also, social workers with a bachelor's degree do not have training to do counseling. One solution that worked well for my school district when faced with difficulty finding school counselors was to provide some financial help to teachers in our district interested in getting their Master's in School Counseling. Those teachers were more likely to stay in the community. The grant to University of Mary for training school counselors is a good idea. The only change I would encourage is to pay part of the tuition instead of all so that more potential school counselors could be trained. Perhaps both North Dakota State University and the University of North Dakota could be included in these grants. Again the **North Dakota School Counselors Association** would be a great resource for potential solutions.

One possible reason for the lack of school counselors could be inadequate salaries to compensate for the requirements to earn a Master's Degree in School or Community Counseling (60 credits). Compare this to the 32-36 credits required to earn a Master's Degree in School Administration. (Source: NDSU Graduate Programs web page). A solution: Perhaps school counselors could be on an enhanced pay scale.

Please take the time to discover the causes of this shortage before making permanent changes.