

March 7, 2023

Re: SB 2340

I would urge a DO NOT PASS vote on SB 2340 or amending the current language of the bill. While mental health professionals are being appropriately utilized in schools for school based mental health counseling, the role they play, along with other professionals/educators included in this bill is far different than the role of a school counselor. To address the great need of students, all of these professionals/educators are vitally important and we seek to work collaboratively with them in their roles. In speaking with three school-based mental health professionals, they spoke passionately about the lack of training to perform the role of a school counselor while utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program to address the social/emotional, career and academic needs of all students. While school counselors and mental health professionals work well together in the best interests of some of our most at risk students, our roles and student impact levels are very different. If other professionals are hired in place of school counselors:

- Students would not receive comprehensive student support services which would allow many students to fall through the cracks.
- Students would miss important opportunities like college and career readiness programming, which will result in negative ramifications for our state workforce.
- The academic supports provided to students through the school counseling program would not be available to help build strong academic skills which results in negative learner outcomes.
- Students would not receive critical social emotional skills lessons provided by the school counseling curriculum.
- School wide prevention activities would not be present.

When thinking about how this bill will impact students, I recall the student and family that I met with this week. We worked through high school registration and transition questions in collaboration with their current team of teachers while also discussing their history of study habits, academic performance and areas of strengths throughout their years in middle school. There is a significant amount of intervention that occurred over time and in collaboration with teachers, family supports, outside supports and the student. I also think about one-on-one minute meetings that school counselors have with all students in our building multiple times a year to collect information and data on which students need connections to a higher level of support within the building. Again, our students would miss opportunities like this without school counselors navigating a comprehensive school counseling program.

I realize the great need for additional supports in our schools and seek to continue to collaborate with the mental health professionals/educators in their roles to collectively support students. If we were to allow other professionals to fill open school counseling positions; I would advocate for a limited 1-year contract while the school district continue to seek out a qualified and licensed school counselor. These 1-year contracts could be renewed each year until a school counselor can be hired but would require schools to continue looking to hire qualified school counselors. Collaboration and collective support from all professionals performing roles within their scope of practice is what's best for students.

