

In opposition to House Bill SB2340

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I am writing in opposition to House Bill SB2340 today as it is written. If schools were to hire mental health professionals to fill open school counseling positions, what will occur once a licensed school counselor is available. If the language stands that a mental health provider can be hired in place of a licensed school counselor, the minimum language should read that hire is with a one-year time limit and or are provided 1-year contracts for mental health professionals hired to fill the mandate. These 1-year contracts can be renewed each year until a school counselor can be hired but will require schools to continue looking to hire school counselors.

While mental health professionals are being hired to fill the mandate, please keep the following items in mind:

1. Learners are not receiving comprehensive student support services provided by school counselors and school counseling programs which could allow many learners to fall through the cracks.
2. Learners will be missing out on vital college and career readiness programming, which will have negative ramifications for our ND Workforce.
3. The academic supports provided to learners through the school counseling program will not be available to help build academic skills which result in better learner outcomes.
4. Learners will not receive important social emotional training provided by the school counseling curriculum.
5. School wide prevention activities will be absent.
6. The majority of ND learners will not have access to counseling services as the majority do not need extensive intervention provided by mental health professionals.
7. Schools are already able to hire mental health professionals to meet student needs... they do not need these professionals to count toward the school counselor ratio in order to hire these support service to help learners while continuing to search for qualified school counselors.
8. School counselors serve on many leadership teams, including the building emergency response team and have had specific training to crisis response and evacuation drills.

This week and last week, as counselors we met 1:1 with all the learners in our building to complete minute meetings. These meetings are a Tier 1 intervention to ask our learners questions from Panorama, a researched based social emotional platform which our district uses to gauge the emotional climate of our school. We use these 1:1 meetings each quarter to get to know our learners and see if there is any need which requires further conversation. They take one day per team, so it takes us 6 full days and one half day to complete each quarter. Our

school social worker splits her time between our school and one other middle school. She has been to our school a total of 10 hours in the past three months. Additionally, our school psychologist splits her time with our school and one elementary school and is here one and half days per week. Today we had a Tier 3 meeting for one student out of 680, and she was not able to attend because she was pulled to her other building which she serves more regularly. If we were not hired or our jobs were supplemented by these two other positions, our learners needs would not be met at a basic level, nor at a high level of intervention.

Similarly, we have developmental training and education which a licensed addiction, or licensed family and marriage counselor would not have received during their education. We are uniquely trained to handle academic interventions, appropriate behavior interventions, life saving interventions in the case of suicidal ideation and or self-harm. School counselors are able to meet the needs of all learners because we have been educated to do so and that is our job. If our math classes were over ratioed, we would not ask a financial advisor to come in for a short amount of time each week to cover the additional students. It makes no sense to hire a non-school counselor to cover our workload, especially when those positions mentioned, are not even full time either.

Please reconsider this bill as it was proposed without consultation with school counselors around the state, was proposed by the education committee without thorough consultation from school counselors around the state and will prove detrimental to learners in our educational system. School counseling programs are effective and for all learners. At the basic level we provide systemic programming for learners to be productive and stable citizens of their communities.