

Chairman Heinert and Representatives of the Education Committee,

As an Elementary Principal, K-12 School Counselor, a parent, and the President-Elect for the ND School Counselor Association I have concerns that the Senate Bill 2340 is premature and that there are unintended consequences that passing it will have on our students.

First, if the numbers reported to NDDPI are accurate as of January 2023, of the 413.6 School Counselor positions across the state there are only 19.6 School Counselor positions unfilled across the state. That means we have a fill rate of 95%.

Based on the information I received from the Universities NDSU, MSUM, U of Mary, and UND the numbers of graduates from their school counseling programs are on the rise and with the following break down for the next 2 years

Spring 2023 MS School Counselor Graduates:

UND: 0 (completing 1st year of program reset)

NDSU: 4

U of Mary: 6

MN State University- Moorhead: 8

Summer 2023 MS School Counselor Graduates:

MSUM- 20 in Certificate program

Spring 2024 MS School Counselor Graduates:

UND: 8

NDSU: 10

U of Mary: 15

MSUM: 10

U of Mary received a \$6 million grant: <https://www.umary.edu/about/news/all-stories/university-mary-awarded-6-million-grant-address-critical-counseling-shortage>

MSUM received a \$3.8 million grant <https://www.mnstate.edu/stories/psychology/msum-continues-legacy-of-serving-high-need-schools/>

ND Universities & K-12 Mental Health Grant: <https://www.cramer.senate.gov/news/press-releases/sen-cramer-north-dakota-universities-k-12-schools-receive-49-million-in-grants-for-mental-health-services>

According to the numbers I have been provided we have an increase in the number of School Counselors graduating and scheduled to be graduating in the next couple of years. Once this fall's numbers come in with the grant funded classes being added into the equation, I believe the ratio of 300:1 is sustainable.

Addressing the unintended consequences, I would like you to think of the 300:1 ratio in these terms. If a math teacher were to teach a classroom of 31 students for 7 periods a day that would equal a ratio of 217:1. That would be considered a very heavy caseload. As a school counselor we are not just expected to teach classroom lessons, but to provide small group counseling, some individual counseling, attend most if not all IEP and 504 meetings, often proctor testing, and a myriad of other duties with the equivalent to a classroom of 43 students per classroom for 7 periods a day.

What happens by increasing the ratio above 300:1 means that the quality of comprehensive care becomes diminished. If other mental health professionals are utilized to count towards this ratio instead of providing mental health support in addition to school counselors (which schools can and should already be doing) is that the actual ratio of students to School Counselors increases and we are neglecting the quality of care to our students.

In the end, this bill is about School Counselors as reflected in the title Section 15.1-06-19 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to required school counselors. With that in mind we ask you to strengthen the role of School Counselors in ND not weaken their impact. We would not allow schools to put anyone with a math related degree into the classroom and expect them to be successful, would we? Would we allow anyone who has any form of English or literature degree or job title to teach our students English? If you truly want to help the safety and the mental health of our students then let us grow within our areas of responsibility not just lump all mental health professionals into one group. Schools need all parts of this team, but all mental health providers have unique roles and ethics codes that they must follow to stay in their practices.

I plan on attending Wednesday the 8th but am free to answer any questions you may have at any time.

Respectfully,

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