

SB 2340: School Counselor Mandate

Noah Brenden Testimony - Wahpeton Public Schools

Thank you for reading this testimony.

I am currently an elementary school counselor in Wahpeton, ND. I am recommending a vote of DO NOT PASS for SB 2340.

As an elementary school counselor, I do not work in isolation; rather I am integral to the total educational program. I provide a proactive program that engages students and includes leadership, advocacy and collaboration with school staff, administration and community/family members in the delivery of programs and activities to help students achieve success. My services are not limited to providing individual counseling, group counseling, and crisis support. I also provide 240+ classroom lessons each school year geared toward social-emotional learning. I lead a mentoring program where each student is matched with a staff member for support. I collaborate with teachers and parents on early identification and intervention of children's academic and social/emotional needs, which is essential in removing barriers to learning and developing skills and behaviors critical for academic achievement.

I ask you to consider amending this bill in a way that preserves the definition and unique role of the School Counselor while also providing the flexibility school districts need to ensure student mental health needs are being met during the current shortage of School Counselors. It would also make sense to consider funding (or refunding) loan forgiveness programs and scholarships/grants for those considering school counseling and other high-demand education positions and increase recruitment efforts to help address these shortages and support additional mental health partnerships between districts and mental health providers to help meet the intensive needs of students that fall outside the scope of a school counselor's role.

I am concerned that the bill in its current form will take away the early identification, collaboration, and immediate teacher/staff support school counselors provide. Please support our students by voting DO NOT PASS for SB 2340 as it is currently written.

Thank you,

Noah Brenden