

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-956

AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Title: PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/15/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/6/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill would have the State Department of Education and the Connecticut School Counselors Association set guidelines and recommendations for best practices in school counseling.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Commissioner, Dianna R. Wentzell, State of Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE):

SDE supports this bill. In 2008 SDE published school counselor guidelines called *A Guide to Comprehensive School Counseling Program Development* which is being revised with the Connecticut School Counselor Association. Commissioner Wentzell requests that, in order to put forth a sufficiently developed and vetted set of school counselor guidelines, the deadline for this bill be extended to January first, two thousand twenty-one.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative, Tim Ackert:

Rep. Tim Ackert supports this bill, but requests an amendment. Rep. Ackert recognizes the positive impact school counselors can have on students emotionally, socially, and behaviorally. With that said, Rep. Ackert requests that the guidelines set by SDE be put to a vote by the Education Committee and state legislature before they are put into effect.

Vice-President, Eric Brown, Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA):

Mr. Brown supports this bill. Mr. Brown appreciates that this bill promotes a holistic approach to education. Guidance counselors can promote workforce readiness. Mr. Brown requests that in developing school counselor guidelines private sector employers have a say in work force readiness, especially the manufacturing sector.

Eric Brown, Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative (CMC):

Mr. Brown supports this bill. Mr. Brown appreciates that this bill promotes a holistic approach to education. Guidance counselors can promote workforce readiness. Mr. Brown requests that in developing school counselor guidelines private sector employers have a say in work force readiness, especially the manufacturing sector.

Chairman, Board of Directors, Virginia A DeLong, Connecticut School Counselor Association:

Chairman DeLong supports this bill. School can no longer be considered as a solely academic exercise. Chairman DeLong states that in her experience over the past fifteen years mental health problems in students have increased drastically. School counseling programs should focus on academic, career, and social emotional learning. School counselors provide tier one counseling that involves skill-building and tier two and tier three counseling which include intervention services and further skill building. School counseling programs work hand in hand with administrators, support staff, teachers, and outside providers to give the best service possible to students. Comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCP) must be implemented to students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Only twenty-five percent of elementary schools have a school counselor. The lack of elementary school counselors result in the absence of preventative school counseling measures and result in a higher burden on middle school and high school counselors' caseloads. Research shows that school counseling in elementary school through high school leads to higher achievement, attendance, and connectedness in schools. In elementary school guidance counsellors have caseloads above five-hundred and middle school counselors have caseloads above three hundred fifty. Chairman DeLong requests that this bill be amended to requiring that schools counselors have caseloads no higher than two hundred fifty students. School counseling is not limited to promoting traditional colleges, they also advocate for careers in manufacturing, law enforcement, military, and computer sciences. Social emotional skills need to be a focus of school counselors to in fixing the root of the problems in traumatized students.

Director, Public Relations Chair, Samantha Eisenberg, Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA):

Director Eisenberg supports this bill. Director Eisenberg states that there is evidence that kindergarten through twelfth grade school counseling improves attendance, discipline, grades, SAT scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment. A comprehensive school counseling program is data driven. High performing schools have one counselor for every one hundred eighty-two high school students and one counselor for every two hundred eleven middle school students. Low performing schools have one counselor for every two hundred eighty-two high school students and one counselor for every eight hundred ninety-one middle school students. Student bodies of a lower socioeconomic and of lower performance have a higher ratio to students and guidance counselors. Fewer than twenty-five percent of elementary school children have access to a guidance counselor.

Policy Coordinator, Jonathon Gonzalez-Cruz, Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D):

C4D supports this bill. School counselors in elementary, middle, and high school are essential support systems for undocumented immigrants. There are over nine thousand undocumented students in Connecticut. Guidance counselors are important in connecting undocumented families to legal aid and social services. Urban schools have less guidance counselors per students than non-urban schools and the highest number of undocumented immigrants. C4D requests that the State Board of Education adopt guidelines for the proper number of guidance counselors per student and commit funds to this program.

Vice-President Elect of Middlesex and Tolland County, Kristin Goodwin, Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA):

Ms. Goodwin supports this bill. Ms. Goodwin state comprehensive school counseling programs are essential for the emotional well-being of students. Comprehensive school counseling programs “are comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature.” CSCA requests that funding be allocated to hire more guidance counselors to meet proper caseload ratios.

President, Jan Hochadel, American Federation of Teachers of Connecticut (AFT CT)

AFT CT supports this bill in so long as it recognizes work environment realities. Counselors must be able to focus on dealing with student emergencies and not be assigned to class coverage during the school day. If this bill adds more responsibilities to guidance counselors AFL CT will not support this bill. AFL CT is cautious in supporting this bill without seeing the language of the supposed guidelines.

Vice-President Elect of Windham and Tolland County, Heather Casale, Connecticut School Counselors Association (CSCA):

Ms. Casale supports this bill. This bill would help bridge the gap of equitable access to comprehensive school counseling. Ms. Casale requests that the underlying bill be amended to have the State Board of Education establish guidelines for student to counselor ratios which would be matched with proper funding.

Director, Eileen Melody, The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA):

Director Melody supports this bill. This bill provides equal access to comprehensive school counseling program. School counsel guidelines have recommendations for academic, social-emotional, post-secondary, and career readiness needs. Elementary schools with guidance counselors have higher performance results regardless of socioeconomic status or location. CSCA requests that the Department of Education adopts guidelines and recommends appropriate student to counselor ratios paired with the proper appropriations to put the recommendations into action.

Senator, Cathy Osten, Connecticut State Senate:

Senator Osten supports this bill. Senator Osten submitted a similar bill (SB464). Senator Osten requests that the guidelines for career counseling include manufacturing and trade schools.

Director, Ray Rossomando, Connecticut Education Association (CEA):

CEA supports this bill. CEA is concerned that there are not enough counselors in elementary schools to offer support for past trauma. Thirty-eight thousand nine hundred six children go to a school with a security guard but without a school counselor. This bill would address what

the role of a guidance counselor should be; many times guidance counselors are forced to do things which are not pertinent to their job such as class coverage.

Career Academy Counselor, Ms. Rachel Arnett, Newington High School

Ms. Arnett supports this bill. Ms. Arnett states that the American School Counselor Association recommends one counselor for every two hundred and fifty students.

School Counselor, Curtis Darragh IV, Danbury Public Schools:

Mr. Curtis supports this bill. Mr. Curtis states that a comprehensive model for school counseling will have a positive impact on middle schools especially. Mr. Curtis requests that the State Board of Education determine appropriate student to counsellor ratios and funding to increase staff numbers.

Kim Fiducia, Louisa Foss-Kelly, James Gorss, Paula Kotara, Gene Rommel, Jeff Rago, Jennifer Parzych, Kathleen Scully, Kaitlin Smedberg, Laura Stabile, Shannon Thomas, Joanna Okosky, Margaret Generali:

These stakeholders are all school counselors that support this. These stakeholders hold the common stance in support of a comprehensive school counseling program. Many of these stakeholders request that the State Department of Education put forth a recommendation to a ratio of students to school counselors and match it with the appropriate funding. School counselors in elementary school can relieve caseload burdens on middle school and high school counselors because they would act as a preventative measure for social-emotional problems. Low ratios of students to counselor in schools have a positive impact on student outcomes. Only twenty-five percent of middle school students have access to guidance counselors in Connecticut.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None.

Reported by: Colin Carroll

Date: 3/20/2019