

Education Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1
AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH
Title: SERVICES IN SCHOOLS.
Vote Date: 3/25/2022
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/21/2022
File No.:

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REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires the Commissioner of Education shall, within available appropriations, on an annual basis not later than January 1, 2023 to develop and distribute a survey to each local and regional board of education concerning the employment of school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, and school nurses by such local or regional board of education. Following the completion of the survey, the bill requires the Commissioner of Education to annually calculate the following ratios: student to school social worker, student to school psychologist, student to school counselor, and student to school nurse. The Commissioner under the bill is then charged with furnishing the General Assembly with a report regarding the various ratios.

Additionally, the bill calls for the Department of Education to administer a grant program to provide grants to local and regional boards of education for the purpose of hiring and retaining additional school social workers and school psychologists.

Furthermore, the bill through the State Board of Education, establishes a human services permit for any applicant with specialized training, experience, or expertise in social work, human services, psychology, or sociology.

The bill then requires the Department of Education in collaboration with the governing authority for intramural and interscholastic athletics to develop a mental health plan for student athletes and requires each local and regional board of education to implement the plan in the July 1, 2023 school year.

Also, the bill requires the State Board of Education in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Health to adopt regulations regarding the conditions and procedures for the storage and administration of opioid antagonists by school personnel to students. And the bill allows a school nurse or qualified school employee to administer first-aid to students that experience an opioid-related drug overdose.

The bill also establishes a minority teacher candidate scholarship program to be administered by the Department of Education in consultation with the Office of Higher Education.

Two task forces are proposed in the legislation, one establishing a task force to combat ableism, and another establishing a task force to study the governance structure and internal procedures of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference.

Furthermore, the bill requires the Commissioner of Early Childhood to coordinate with local and regional school readiness councils to conduct a needs assessment for infant, toddler and preschool spaces in school readiness programs throughout the state and requires the Commissioner of Early Childhood to act on the results of the assessment by increasing or adjusting the number of infant, toddler and preschool spaces in school readiness programs to meet demand.

The bill also increases the per child sliding fee scale for the school readiness program and establishes an early childhood care and education salary enhancement grant program to be administered by the Office of Early Childhood.

Moreover, the bill requires that each employee of an early childhood care and education program be paid an annual salary as prescribed in the proposed early childhood educator compensation schedule established by the Office of Early Childhood

Lastly, the bill makes several appropriations.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker, CT State Dept. of Education

"We believe it is not in the best interests of our students for non-certified bachelor's degree individuals to provide "mental health and human services", as they do not have the requisite training and skills necessary. We believe the bill should include language that allows local education agencies (LEAs) to employ such individuals to "assist in providing supports to students including case management, care coordination, etc. under the supervision of a certified school Social Worker." Requiring school social workers to conduct home visits as a legal requirement may have unintended consequences on staffing for an already struggling endorsement area. Furthermore, LEAs should determine the need for home visits on a student-by-student basis in consultation with families. Lastly, if this were to pass as is, we do not have the capacity to add additional layering of processing of permits without added staff capacity."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Donald E. Williams, Executive Director, Connecticut Education Association

"The CEA strongly supports SB 1 concerning mental and physical health for students in our schools. In the years prior to the pandemic, educators and parents were already focused on the critical link between student health and academic progress for students. The pandemic underscored the need for more resources—additional social workers, counselors, access to healthcare resources, and lower student-to-teacher ratios. Identifying and addressing student health needs as early as possible leads to better outcomes in every way."

Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities

"The bill would, among other things, (1) create a state grant that would provide assistance to local boards of education hire additional social workers, (2) provide resources for scholastic athletes regarding mental health, (3) require the implementation of mental health plans for student athletes, (4) allow for schools to be equipped with Narcan, (5) support efforts for minority teacher retirement, and (6) make changes to the school readiness program, along with efforts to support early childhood education."

Doug Nakashima, Chief Operating Officer, YMCA of Greater Hartford

"Quality childcare is a necessity if our state's economy is to return to prepandemic levels. Childcare is already unaffordable and without a meaningful increase in reimbursement rates,

the state will be making the children care system significantly more expensive. It is imperative that our childcare centers receive a rate increase so that we can continue to provide safe and quality childcare to Connecticut's children."

Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN

"Senate Bill 1 makes key investments in postsecondary education program scholarships for students from Priority School Districts, whose student population is 83.1% students of color, on average. The scholarship program supports students up to \$20,000 a year for their education. This is life changing. We hope there are opportunities to expand the available fund for this."

Senate Democrats, Connecticut General Assembly

"Senate Bill 1 will launch several initiatives that will equip schools to better meet students where they are and address their mental, physical, and behavioral health needs... This is a comprehensive bill to truly address educational and school-based needs for Connecticut's students from preschool through high school. These initiatives will directly impact the health, wellbeing, and success of our students, and begin our work toward establishing universal pre-K in the state. We hope you will join us in offering resounding support for the legislation."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Joanne Tremblay Jackson, Director, Student Support Services in Hartford

"I, Joanne Tremblay Jackson, agree as a Social Worker and person who works in schools that the pandemic has increased the need for more qualified mental health providers to work in schools. The acuity of need and trauma we work within our school systems requires the specialized training that only a graduate or doctoral degree in the behavioral health field can provide. I object to the language in section 3 only, this language would allow unqualified bachelors level people to offer mental health services in schools. It is unconscionable that somehow with the gravity of need the thinking is unqualified people could offer therapeutic services in schools. This would increase the burden on qualified staff to somehow supervise these staff and ensure students are receiving proper treatment and are being evaluated well for risks and level of need."

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter

"NASW/CT opposes section 3 and urges it be deleted. The pandemic has brought on an urgent need for more mental health providers to work within schools. The acuity of the mental health needs of students requires the specialized training that only a graduate or doctoral degree in a behavioral health field can provide. Even then current school mental health professionals struggle with the level of needs being exhibited by students. To allow baccalaureate degreed individuals to provide mental health services with students carries the serious risk of doing more harm than good. Plus, such baccalaureate trained persons would require close supervision by a graduate degree mental health professional in the school, taking time away that the supervisor would otherwise have to perform their current roles. We understand the need for more mental health providers in schools, but this is not the answer. Rather than expend funds by SDE to administer the permit program, better to apply those funds toward the hiring of more qualified mental health providers, such as school social workers that require a master degree in social work."

All other testimony on SB-1 can be found on the [CGA website](#).

Reported by: Jessica Bucci

Date: 3/28/22