



House Office Building, 9 South
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

NON TEACHER-CERTIFICATED SCHOOL COUNSELORS

House Bill 5740 (Substitute H-3) First Analysis (5-17-00)

Sponsor: Rep. Gerald Van Woerkom
Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to committee testimony, Michigan's current ratio of students to school counselors is 638 to 1, and the national average is 561 to 1. The ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association is 250 students for each counselor, while the Michigan Department of Education recommends a ratio of 400 to 1 in elementary schools and 350 to 1 in secondary schools..

Michigan ranks 42nd among the 50 states in its student-to-counselor ratio. Indeed, reports indicate that more than 100 Michigan school districts (nearly 20 percent of the 524 K-12 districts in the state) may be without any counselor at all. The lack of school counselors seems due in part to a decline in the number who have been certified during this decade. According to a report entitled "Preliminary School Counselor Endorsement: A Proposal to the Michigan Department of Education Professional Standards Commission," there has been a 13 percent decline in the total number of school counselors in the state since 1993, despite the fact that the number of students has increased. For example, the total number of school counselors reported in the 1996-97 school year was 2,366, while the number three years earlier in 1993-94 was 2,723. What's more, fewer people have entered and graduated from counselor education institutions in the past five years. In fact, data reported in 1998 indicate there has been a 30 percent decline in new school counselor endorsements in the State of Michigan since 1993. For example, there were 203 new endorsements that year, compared to only 142 new endorsements in 1997. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION*, "Counselor Shortage and Preliminary Endorsement", below.)

Due to the shortage of school counselors, the State Board of Education unanimously approved a proposal by the Michigan School Counselor Association and seven Michigan teacher preparation institutions to create a preliminary authorization to work as a school counselor while fulfilling requirements for the masters degree. Those who advocate more counselors acknowledge that students face many social pressures

and individual problems that adults who are guidance counselors can help them to address and sometimes solve. Occasionally those social and individual difficulties have an effect on overall school safety, and school counselors are able to assist young people who feel extraordinary alienation and anxiety in school.

Under the current law, a school counselor must have a teaching certificate in order to work in the public schools. Consequently, people who come to Michigan from out of state and who have academic degrees and work experience in guidance counseling are unable to become school counselors without first acquiring a teaching certificate.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5740 would amend the Revised School Code to allow, under certain circumstances, a school district to employ a school counselor who was not certified as a teacher.

Currently under the law, the board of a school district or intermediate school district cannot allow a teacher who does not hold a valid teaching certificate to teach in a grade or department of the school, or a teacher without an endorsement by the state board to serve in a counseling role, as that role is defined by the state board.

House Bill 5740 specifies instead that the board of a school district or the board of an intermediate school district could allow an individual to serve in a counseling role in the school district or intermediate school district as that role was defined by the superintendent of public instruction, if the individual met one or more of the following, and the board or intermediate school board required a criminal history background check (as required of new teachers) for the individual:

House Bill 5740 (5-17-00)

a) the individual held a valid teaching certificate with a counseling endorsement;

b) the individual met all of the following:

- held a master's degree awarded after completion of an approved school counselor education program that included at least all of the following skills and content areas or their equivalent: (a) guidance services--philosophy, principles, and practice; (b) individual and group analysis--nature and range of human characteristics and appraisal methods; (c) guidance information--vocational development theory; educational and occupational information; (d) counseling theory and practice--individual and group procedures, administration and coordination relationships, professional relationships, and ethics; (e) supervised experiences--laboratory, practicum, or internship; and, (f) evaluation--statistics and research methodology, follow-up evaluation, and measurement methods.

- had successfully completed the department's guidance counselor examination; and,

- had been recommended by an approved school counselor education program to provide services as a school counselor.

c) or, the individual met both of the following:

- had at least five years of successful experience serving in a school counseling role in another state within the immediately preceding seven-year period; and,

- had successfully completed the department's guidance counselor examination.

In addition, the current law requires an intermediate superintendent to notify immediately the state board of the names of noncertificated teachers who are teaching in violation of this provision, and the names of nonendorsed teachers serving in counseling roles, the employing district, and the amount of time the noncertificated and nonendorsed teachers were employed. House Bill 5740 specifies that the intermediate superintendent would instead immediately

notify the superintendent of public instruction, and the bill would eliminate the references to nonendorsed teachers in this provision.

Finally, House Bill 5740 would delete an outdated provision of the law which allowed the board of a school district or intermediate school district to renew through June 30, 1995, an annual vocational authorization of a noncertificated vocational teacher who was employed by the district, under certain conditions.

MCL 380.1233

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Counselor shortage and preliminary school counselor endorsement. All 10 higher education institutions in the state that educate school counselors consistently report difficulty in attracting students into school counselor training programs. A discussion of reasons for that difficulty and the shortage of school counselors that is the result, as well as data about the magnitude of the problem for Michigan school districts, can be found in the report "Preliminary School Counselor Endorsement: A Proposal to the Michigan Department of Education Professional Standards Commission," which was prepared by researchers from five of the 10 universities that educate and recommend certification of school counselors.

According to the report, among the causes of the school counselor shortage are a) the difficulty of the work and the working conditions in schools; b) current high retirement rates among school counselors (the average school counselor is 50 years of age and the shortage is expected to increase during the coming five years when an estimated 36 percent will retire); and c) the 48-credit-hour/600-hour internship requirements that constitute most school counseling education masters degree programs (when other education masters degree programs often are only 30 to 35 credit-hours in length).

To retain the high standards and the length of the course-of-study for masters-trained school counselors, an experimental program has been approved by the State Board of Education and the Department of Education to allow preliminary certification for up to three years after a school counselor has completed 34 hours of study in a school counselor masters program. Then, full certification is possible for candidates after 40 credit-hours of course work have been successfully completed.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Fiscal information is not available.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

There is a severe shortage of qualified school counselors in Michigan. Indeed, Michigan’s counselor-to-student ratio in the state’s nearly 3,500 school buildings is 1 to 638. Consequently, the state ranks 42nd among the 50 states. The school counselor shortage is caused in part because Michigan, unlike most states, requires school counselors to also be teacher-certified. Although teacher-certification can be helpful to counselors when they work in schools, it should not preclude the employment of those who, while not teacher-certified, are fully able and aptly-trained to provide counseling services. In order to hire more counselors in schools, the administrators of school districts must be able to hire teacher-certified counselors and others. This legislation will allow them to do so.

Against:

School counselors should continue to be teacher-certified, as they currently are in Michigan and 11 other states. High standards for the adults who work in schools must remain high if those adults are to raise the standards for the school children who study there. Customarily, the guidance counselors working in schools teach; they provide academic counseling services; and, school counselors offer career guidance. They also provide individual and group counseling services when students have problems working together, or when school or family crises arise. Because school-life is central to the work of school guidance counselors, they must work as credible partners in teams that include a student’s teachers and school administrators. Teacher-certification helps to ensure that the school counselors are respected and knowledgeable members of those teams.

Against:

Michigan’s student-to-counselor ratio is 638:1. The ratio is unacceptable, and the number of students or advisees for each counselor must be reduced. To that end, this bill should be amended to require that school districts meet the student-to-counselor ratio that is recommended by the American Counseling Association: 300 students for each counselor.

Response:

The 300:1 ratio has been proposed in House Bill 5649 which was introduced in April 2000 but which has not yet been scheduled for a committee hearing. According to the House Fiscal Agency in a fiscal note dated 4-18-00, the 300 to 1 ratio would cost schools an additional \$187,300,000 over the current cost of employing counselors. This estimate is based on fall enrollment of 1.7 million students and a cost-per-counselor of \$57,271, including salary and benefits. Whether the cost is borne by the state or by local school districts would depend on whether the state appropriated additional money to reimburse districts for the additional cost.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Education Association supports the bill. (5-16-00)

The Michigan Federation of Teachers and Related School Personnel supports the bill. (5-16-00)

The Michigan Association of School Administrators supports any legislation that could increase the pool of counselor applicants. (5-16-00)

Oakland Schools supports the bill. (5-16-00)

The Michigan Counseling Association and the Michigan School Counselor Association would withdraw its opposition if the bill were amended to codify the Preliminary School Counselor Endorsement in the bill. (5-16-00)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.