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Senate Bill 162 (Substitute S-2 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Sean McCann
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 5-8-23

RATIONALE

According to testimony, Michigan schools are facing a shortage of school counselors. Prospective counselors may be discouraged by the high education requirements and practicum hours needed to enter the profession. Current counselors may be burdened by the general shortage of school staff, requiring them to assume roles unrelated to counseling. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic may have negatively affected counselors and the students they support, contributing to burnout and emotional fatigue.¹ Some people believe that this counselor shortage deprives students of a vital mental health resource. Accordingly, it has been suggested that Michigan ease the process of becoming a school counselor in the State.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to do the following:

- Modify the requirements for an individual to serve as a school counselor.**
- Allow an individual with a counseling license from out of state, country, or Federally recognized Indian tribe to obtain reciprocity if he or she had served as a counselor for three years and successfully completed the Department of Education (MDE) school counselor examination.**
- Allow the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to issue a preliminary counselor license for an individual who had completed at least 30 semester hours in an approved school counselor preparation program and who had completed the MDE school counselor examination.**
- Allow the SPI to issue a temporary school counselor license to an individual with a counseling license from out of state, country, or from a Federally recognized Indian tribe if the individual did not meet certain requirements.**

School Counselor License

Among other things, the Code prescribes qualifications an individual must have for the board of a school district or intermediate school district (ISD) to allow him or her to serve as a school counselor. Currently, a board may not allow an individual to serve in a counseling role in the school district unless he or she meets one of the following:

- The individual holds a valid teaching certificate with a school counseling endorsement.
- The individual has a master's degree awarded after the completion of an approved school counselor program that included specified skills and content areas, has completed the MDE's school counselor examination, and has been recommended by an approved school counselor education program to provide school counselor services.

¹ Altavena, Lily. "Michigan near rock bottom for the student to counselor ratios in the nation. How it affects students", *Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 6, 2021.

- The individual has at least five years of successful experience serving in a school counseling role in another state within the immediately preceding seven-year period and has completed the MDE's school counselor examination.

The bill would delete these requirements. Instead, under the bill, the board of a school district or ISD could not allow an individual to serve in a counseling role unless the individual held a valid school counselor credential. The SPI could issue a school counselor license only to an individual who met one or more of the following requirements:

- The individual held a master's degree awarded after the completion of a school counselor education program that was approved by the SPI based on standards developed by the MDE in consultation with practicing school counselors, representatives from school counselor preparations programs, and State associations representing school counselors and had successfully completed the MDE school counselor examination.
- The individual held a school counselor license from another state, country, or Federally recognized Indian tribe and had at least three years of successful experience serving in a school counseling role or had successfully completed the MDE school counselor examination.

"Individual holding a school counselor license from another state, country, or Federally recognized Indian tribe" or "individual who holds a school counselor license from another state, country, or Federally recognized Indian tribe" would mean an individual with a valid school counselor credential who is eligible for a school counselor credential in the state or country or with the Federally recognized Indian tribe in which the individual holds the credential or is eligible for the credential.

"School counselor credential" would mean the following:

- A school counselor endorsement on a valid Michigan teaching certificate.
- A preliminary school counselor license, as proposed by the bill.
- A temporary school counselor license, as proposed by the bill.
- A school counselor license.

Under the bill, "school counselor credential" would apply to a school counselor credential from another state, country, or Federally recognized tribe. The bill would require the SPI to deny a Michigan school counselor credential to an individual for fraud, material misrepresentation, or concealment in the individual's application for a license or a conviction for which an individual's State board approval could be suspended under Section 1539b. (Generally, Section 1539b prescribes the penalties to an individual who holds State board approval and has been convicted of a crime.)

Preliminary Counselor License

Under the bill, the SPI could issue a preliminary school counselor license to an individual enrolled in an approved school counselor preparation program if he or she met the following requirements:

- The individual had completed at least 30 semester hours in an approved school counselor preparation program.
- The individual had successfully completed the MDE school counselor examination.

Temporary Counselor License

Under the bill, if an individual holding a school counselor license from another state, country, or Federally recognized Indian tribe applied for a Michigan school counselor license and met all the requirements for the license except for passage of the reciprocity requirements, the SPI would have to issue a nonrenewable temporary school counselor license that would be valid for one year, to the individual. The bill would prohibit the SPI from issuing a Michigan school counselor license to the individual after the temporary license had expired unless the individual completed the licensing requirements.

MCL 380.1233

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Extending reciprocity to counselors outside of Michigan would help reduce the counselor shortage in the State. During the 2019-2020 school year, Michigan had the second-highest student to counselor ratio in the nation at 671:1.² The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250:1 ratio. With rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues rising among young people, the State does not have enough counselors to support them. Thus, Michigan should adopt a reciprocal credential system to attract counselors from other states, countries, and from Federally recognized Indian tribes to reduce its student to counselor ratio and bolster its mental health infrastructure.

Supporting Argument

Removing barriers to entering the school counseling field could encourage more counselors to pursue the profession. To serve as a counselor in Michigan, an individual must meet several requirements. Firstly, he or she must hold a master's degree awarded after completion of an approved school counselor program. Secondly, the individual must have successfully passed the MDE school counselor examination. Thirdly, he or she must have a recommendation from an approved school counselor education program to provide school counseling services.

An individual also may serve as a counselor if he or she holds a valid teaching certificate with a school counselor endorsement. To receive this endorsement, an individual must have fulfilled the latter two requirements listed above and complete a 600-hour practicum under a credentialed school counselor's supervision, with at least half of those hours spent in a school setting (R 390.1303). Many consider these requirements cumbersome. The State should streamline the process of receiving a school counselor license, such as by adjusting the standards for a school counselor education program, to encourage prospective school counselors to pursue the profession.

Legislative Analyst: Abby Schneider

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the MDE and on local ISDs, school districts, and public school academies (PSAs).

² *Id.*

The MDE would experience one-time and ongoing costs to update the school counselor credential requirement, certify out-of-State counselors, and issue a preliminary school counselor license. The costs would include one-time information technology costs to update the teacher certification system, and staff to update the new school counselor certification requirements. The MDE already has begun to update the teacher certification system and the full one-time costs likely would be supported with current appropriation. Ongoing costs would be minimal and likely would be supported with current appropriations. The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on local ISDs, school districts, and PSAs. Schools likely would be able to hire school counselors who hold a certification from out-of-State more easily, which could reduce the amount of time to hire school counselors. The overall costs throughout the State are indeterminate because of the differing needs and situations for each school.

Fiscal Analyst: Cory Savino, PhD

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.