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Prime Sponsor: Rep. Karen Middleton, D-Aurora
Sen. Bob Bacon, D-Ft. Collins

Bill Status: House Education

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TITLE: Concerning increasing the level of services provided by school counselors to students in public secondary schools, and, in connection therewith, creating the Counselor Corps Grant Program and making an appropriation.

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. By increasing the number of counselors in our public secondary schools and improving the level of guidance available to students, the bill represents an important step toward closing the state’s achievement gaps, reducing the dropout rate, and increasing the number of students who successfully transition to postsecondary educational opportunities and careers.

Colorado Department of Education data show that, in 2005-06, 18,031 students dropped out of school statewide.¹ By reducing student-to-counselor ratios, particularly in schools with high populations of at-risk and low-income students, and increasing the guidance available for those students, the number of dropouts would decrease. Over time, this means hundreds more students could graduate from high school and earn postsecondary degrees or certificates, giving them better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and self-sufficiency.

Summary of Legislation

The bill creates the School Counselor Corps Grant Program. This 3-year program would provide state moneys to school districts, Boards of Cooperative Services, and charter schools to increase the number of counselors and the level of counseling services available for secondary students. The bill directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules to implement the grant program, and requires the Colorado Department of Education to administer it. It specifies the criteria to use in making awards, and directs the department and board to work with experts in counseling to administer the grants.

Background

A broad range of studies clearly show that effective school counseling contributes significantly to the personal and academic success of students, reduces dropout rates, and influences students’ college-going decisions.² Providing the personnel and funding for reasonable student-to-counselor ratios supports student success by ensuring that young people have access to the guidance they and their families need to make informed choices.

The American School Counseling Association recommends a maximum ratio of 250 students for every counselor. Based on 2005-06 data, however, the national average is 476 students per counselor. Colorado’s average is 548 students per counselor.³

Along with carrying significantly higher-than-recommended caseloads, school counselors are increasingly called upon to perform functions other than postsecondary guidance. For example, a recent study in Michigan found that counselors spend only 29 percent of their time helping students and their families with postsecondary planning, but up to 55 percent of their time either responding to incidents and immediate needs, or on duties related to administration and paperwork.⁴

Colorado’s P-20 Education Coordinating Council has recommended that “the state establish postsecondary preparation as a primary purpose of our PK-12 educational system.” Among the steps the Council identified for achieving this goal was enhancing our schools’ counseling and guidance capacity.⁵

The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

Research/Evidence of Effectiveness

Research clearly shows school counselors and the guidance they provide can have a significant, positive effect on students' academic and personal growth, as well as on reduced dropout rates (see end note #2).

Specifically related to dropout prevention, research highlights the "3 R's" needed for increased student success. They are:

- Rigor: setting high expectations for all students, and providing the support to help them succeed.
- Relevance: ensuring that courses and projects engage students' interest and clearly relate to their current and future lives and careers.
- Relationships: creating connections with caring adults, inside and outside school, who support and encourage students to achieve their full potential.⁶

Along with parents and teachers, counselors can be among the most important adults who make a critical difference in students' lives through the power of caring relationships and informed guidance.

Based on the evidence, the Bell Policy Center recommended in its *Blueprint for Opportunity* in 2006 that Colorado increase the number of counselors in our schools—especially those serving low-income and at-risk students—and improve the guidance students get in planning their futures.⁷ HB 08-1370 is fully consistent with this recommendation.

Estimate of Impact and Benefits

HB 08-1370 will translate into lower dropout rates and increased postsecondary success for students. Students who have the support and guidance to make informed academic and career choices are more likely to graduate and go on to earn post-secondary credentials. This carries both personal and social benefits. On a personal level, earnings dramatically increase and unemployment rates decrease with each higher level of education attained.⁸ And on the societal level, the foundation of a strong and competitive state economy is a well-educated workforce.

End notes

- ¹ [Colorado Department of Education, 2006 Colorado Education Facts.](#)
- ² See for example the following: "[Research on School Counseling Effectiveness](#)," California Department of Education.
"[Effectiveness of School Counseling](#)," American Counseling Association, Office of Public Policy and Legislation, 2008.
Christopher Sink and Heather Stroh, "[Improving Academic Achievement in Primary Students Through a Systemic Approach to Guidance and Counseling](#)," Research Report No. 4, April 2003, Washington School Research Center.
G. Brigman and C. Campbell, "[Does Implementing a Research-Based School Counseling Curriculum Enhance Student Achievement?](#)" School Counseling Research Brief 2.3, April 15, 2004, Center for School Counseling Outcome Research.
Colorado Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, [Final Report](#), Nov. 16, 2005.
- ³ "[Student-to-Counselor Ratios by State \(U.S. Schools Overall\)](#)," based on National Center for Education Statistics data from the 2005-06 data year, American Counseling Association, Oct. 2007.
- ⁴ "[The Eleven-Month Challenge: 22 Recommendations for Improving the Transition from High School to College](#)," The Joyce Ivy Foundation, 2008 Michigan High School Counselor Report.
- ⁵ "[P-20 Education Council 2007 Recommendations to Governor Ritter](#)."
- ⁶ Presentation and handout on "State Legislative Efforts to Reduce Dropouts," by Sunny Deye, National Conference of State Legislatures, Colorado Statewide Dropout Summit, Dec. 5, 2007. See also [information online regarding "the 3 R's" in dropout prevention](#).
- ⁷ Frank Waterous, "[Implementing Bell's Blueprint recommendation No. 6 to improve guidance for students, and expand the reach of pre-collegiate programs](#)," The Bell Policy Center, Blueprint for Opportunity Implementation Memo No.6, Dec. 4, 2006.
- ⁸ For data on the differences in earning-potential and unemployment based on educational attainment see "[Education and Training Pay](#)," [Postsecondary Education Opportunity](#), Oskaloosa, Iowa, and Dr. Tucker Hart Adams, "[The Impact of Public Higher Education on the State of Colorado](#)," Dec. 2007.