

SUBJECT: Guidelines for public school counselors

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith
0 nays
2 absent — Dutton, Hardcastle

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 26 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Alma Leal, The Texas Counseling Association; Betty Porter
Against — None
On — David Anderson, Texas Education Agency

BACKGROUND: Education Code, ch. 33, subchapter A sets forth guidelines for school counselors and counseling programs only in school districts that receive certain funds from the compensatory education allotment for educationally disadvantaged students with special remedial needs in elementary school programs.

Under sec. 33.003, the board of trustees must adopt guidelines to ensure that written parental consent was obtained for the student to participate in activities for which the district required parental consent. Under sec. 33.004, schools are required to keep parental consent forms as part of a student's permanent record. Prior to implementing a comprehensive and developmental guidance and counseling program, each school must preview the program to parents annually. All materials, including the curriculum, must be available for parents to preview; materials not previewed may not be used.

Under sec. 33.005, a person employed as a certified counselor is required to work with school faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community to plan, implement, and evaluate a developmental guidance and counseling program. The counselor also is required to design the program to include:

- ! a guidance curriculum to help students reach their full educational potential; responsive services to intervene on behalf of students whose immediate personal concerns put their development at risk;
- ! an individual planning system for student guidance; and
- ! a support system for the efforts of teachers, parents, and the community in promoting development of students.

The primary responsibility of a school counselor under sec. 33.006 is to counsel students to fully develop each student's academic, career, personal, and social abilities. It also requires the counselor to participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program to:

- ! address all students while serving the special needs of at risk students;
- ! consult with parents to make appropriate referrals;
- ! consult with staff, parents, and community members to help them increase the effectiveness of education and student success;
- ! coordinate resources;
- ! interpret test scores and other data that help a student make educational and career plans; and
- ! deliver classroom guidance activities or serve as a consultant to teachers conducting lessons based on the school's guidance curriculum.

DIGEST:

SB 518 would amend the Education Code to make secs. 33.003-33.006 apply to all school districts, not just those that receive compensatory education allotments.

A school counselor would be required to design a developmental guidance and counseling program that helped students develop their full educational potential, including a student's interests and career objectives.

The comprehensive developmental guidance program would have to address the special needs of students who were gifted and talented, with an emphasis on identifying and serving gifted and talented students who were educationally disadvantaged.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001. It would apply beginning with the 2001-02 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 518 would allow school counselors to use all the skills for which they were educated. School counselors are well-trained professionals who must meet specific state criteria to be certified, including passing a particular certification exam. Counselors have education in many areas including crisis intervention, group counseling, individual counseling, and college counseling, but unfortunately many of them are not afforded the opportunity to use this education in their school counseling positions. It is a serious waste of resources for counselors, universities and other counseling education programs, and the state to spend time planning and delivering counseling education without also requiring that school counselors be permitted to use that education.

SB 518 is needed to extend guidelines already outlined in the Education Code to all school districts and to clarify the duties of all public school counselors. Extending these guidelines would ensure that school counselors' primary focus was on the children. Many school counselors spend the majority of their time doing non-counseling work, such as administrative and clerical tasks, record-keeping unrelated to counseling, administering exams, and acting as substitute teachers. These duties leave counselors little, if any, time to work directly with children as counselors. According to a Texas Education Agency report, counselors who are employed by schools subject to the guidelines of Education Code, ch. 33 spent less time doing administrative and clerical tasks unrelated to guidance and more time counseling students.

When school counselors are not available in their capacity as counselors, it is the students who suffer. Students need counselors to help them with their stress and confusion, family issues (including alcoholism and abuse), and educational and career plans beyond high school. Students who are unable to obtain counseling to help them deal with their problems may resort to other less reliable sources.

SB 518 would provide needed support to gifted and talented students. Much of the educational debate surrounds low-performing students who need additional academic help. Gifted students often are all but ignored, on the assumption that they will do fine without additional help. Gifted students, however, often have special needs, particularly if they come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Gifted students often feel stress and competition and may be confused about their career and educational goals. Many gifted students perform well on exams but receive failing grades in their classes; they drop out of school because they do not feel challenged by their classwork. These students need counselors to help them explore their academic opportunities, such as early college courses. In many cases, parents are not knowledgeable about educational opportunities for their children. Gifted students, particularly those from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds, may not have a ready source of information on colleges, scholarships, or other opportunities, except for the school counselor.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.