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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5369**

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**State of Washington**

**69th Legislature**

**2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Orwall, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Lias, Nobles, Valdez, and C. Wilson)

READ FIRST TIME 02/14/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to enhancing youth mental health and well-being  
2 through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools;  
3 amending RCW 28A.410.044, 28A.320.280, and 28A.310.235; and adding  
4 new sections to chapter 28A.310 RCW.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.310  
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 The legislature finds that Washington youth require additional  
9 support in order to thrive. Washington has the ninth highest school  
10 refusal rate in the country, with 30 percent of K-12 students missing  
11 more than 10 percent of the school year. A significant number of  
12 Washington's youth experience high rates of emotional, developmental,  
13 or behavioral distress, or thoughts of suicide.

14 The legislature further finds that school social workers are  
15 uniquely positioned to contribute to K-12 student safety, address  
16 student behavioral health care needs, and support students with  
17 individualized education programs. School social workers collaborate  
18 with school personnel, families, and community organizations to  
19 reduce absenteeism, support student mental health, address systemic  
20 inequalities, and create inclusive learning environments that prepare  
21 students for success in a diverse society. School social workers

1 promote social and economic justice and are an integral part of the  
2 mental health continuum of care in the school setting.

3 The legislature further finds that the national association of  
4 school social workers recommends a ratio of one school social worker  
5 to every 250 students, but that Washington has only one school social  
6 worker for every 3,798 students. Washington would need to increase  
7 this ratio by 93 percent to meet the national standard.

8 It is therefore the intent of the legislature to increase student  
9 access to school social workers through workforce development and  
10 collaboration with community organizations and accredited university  
11 programs.

12 **Sec. 2.** RCW 28A.410.044 and 2018 c 200 s 3 are each amended to  
13 read as follows:

14 (1) A school psychologist is a professional educator who holds a  
15 valid school psychologist certification as defined by the  
16 professional educator standards board. Pursuant to the national  
17 association of school psychologists' model for comprehensive and  
18 integrated school psychological services, school psychologists  
19 deliver services across ten domains of practice. Two domains permeate  
20 all areas of service delivery: Data-based decision making; and  
21 consultation and collaboration. Five domains encompass direct and  
22 indirect services to children and their families: Student-level  
23 services, interventions, and instructional supports to develop  
24 academic skills; student-level interventions and mental health  
25 services to develop social and life skills; systems-level school-wide  
26 practices to promote learning; systems-level preventive and  
27 responsive services; and systems-level family school collaboration  
28 services. The three foundational domains include: Knowledge and  
29 skills related to diversity in development and learning; research and  
30 program evaluation; and legal and ethical practice.

31 (2) (a) A school social worker is a professional in the fields of  
32 social work and education who holds a valid school social worker  
33 certification as defined by the professional educator standards  
34 board. The purpose and role of the school social worker is to  
35 ~~((provide an integral))~~ serve as a link between school, home, and  
36 community ~~((in))~~, helping students achieve academic and social  
37 success. This is accomplished by removing barriers and providing  
38 services that may include: Mental health ~~((and academic counseling,~~  
39 ~~support for students and parents, crisis prevention and intervention,~~

1 professional case management, collaboration with other professionals,  
2 organizations, and community agencies, and advocacy for students and  
3 parents. School social workers work directly with school  
4 administrators as well as students and families, at various levels  
5 and as part of an interdisciplinary team in the educational system,  
6 including at the building, district, and state level. School social  
7 workers provide leadership and professional expertise regarding the  
8 formation of school discipline policies and procedures, and through  
9 school-based mental health services, crisis management, the  
10 implementation of social-emotional learning, and other support  
11 services that impact student academic and social-emotional success.  
12 School social workers also facilitate community involvement in the  
13 schools while advocating for student success)) counseling; crisis  
14 intervention; behavioral consultation; trauma-informed care; suicide  
15 risk assessment, management, and treatment; support and advocacy for  
16 students and families; professional case management; and developing  
17 and implementing individualized education programs and plans  
18 developed under section 504 of the federal rehabilitation act of  
19 1973.

20 (b) School social workers provide leadership and professional  
21 expertise in the development of school discipline policies and  
22 procedures, emphasizing best practices. School social workers also  
23 leverage data to track trends, monitor student progress, and assess  
24 the effectiveness of interventions. As trained mental health  
25 clinicians, school social workers support implementation of social-  
26 emotional learning and foster supportive school environments for all  
27 students.

28 **Sec. 3.** RCW 28A.320.280 and 2018 c 200 s 2 are each amended to  
29 read as follows:

30 The school counselor works with developing and leading a  
31 comprehensive guidance and counseling program to focus on the  
32 academic, career, personal, and social needs of all students. School  
33 psychologists carry out special education evaluation duties, among  
34 other things. School social workers (~~promote and support students'~~  
35 ~~health, academic, and social success with counseling and support, and~~  
36 ~~by providing and coordinating specialized services and resources))  
37 have the role and scope explicated in RCW 28A.410.044(2). All of  
38 these professionals are also involved in multitiered systems of  
39 support for academic and behavioral skills. These professionals focus~~

1 on student mental health, work with at-risk and marginalized  
2 students, perform risk assessments, and collaborate with mental  
3 health professionals to promote student achievement and create a safe  
4 learning environment. In order that school counselors, school social  
5 workers, and school psychologists have the time available to  
6 prioritize these functions, in addition to other activities requiring  
7 direct student contact, responsibilities such as data input and data  
8 tracking should be handled by nonlicensed, noncertified staff, where  
9 possible.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.310  
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
13 specific purpose, each educational service district may coordinate  
14 with:

15 (a) Local mental health agencies and local school districts to  
16 arrange for in-school placements of social worker associates licensed  
17 under RCW 18.225.145 and to coordinate clinical supervision for  
18 approved supervisors that meet the requirements as defined in rule by  
19 the department of health to provide the necessary supervision to the  
20 social worker associates;

21 (b) Local school districts and accredited university programs to  
22 support masters of social work candidates in obtaining an in-school  
23 placement and a conditional educational staff associate certificate  
24 as provided by the professional educator standards board; and

25 (c) Local school districts, accredited university programs, and  
26 behavioral health agencies to support postmasters of social work  
27 professionals in obtaining an in-school placement. These positions  
28 must be coordinated between the educational service district and  
29 behavioral health agencies.

30 (2) The Washington professional educator standards board shall  
31 adopt rules to implement this section, including conditions for the  
32 placement of social worker associates licensed under RCW 18.225.145  
33 and graduate students enrolled in a master of social work program at  
34 an accredited college or university in a public school setting.

35 **Sec. 5.** RCW 28A.310.235 and 2019 c 295 s 102 are each amended to  
36 read as follows:

37 (1) For the purpose of this section, "educator" means a  
38 paraeducator, teacher, principal, administrator, superintendent,

1 school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, school  
2 nurse, school physical therapist, school occupational therapist, or  
3 school speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

4 (2) An educational service district may employ a person whose  
5 duties are to provide to local school districts the following  
6 services related to educator recruitment:

7 (a) Serve as a liaison between local school districts and  
8 educator preparation programs, between their region and other regions  
9 in the state, and between the local school districts and agencies  
10 that may be helpful in educator recruitment efforts, including the  
11 office of the superintendent of public instruction, the Washington  
12 professional educator standards board, the paraeducator board, the  
13 student achievement council, the state board for community and  
14 technical colleges, the state department of veterans affairs, the  
15 state military department, and the workforce training and education  
16 coordinating board;

17 (b) Encourage and support local school districts to develop or  
18 expand a recruiting Washington teachers program under RCW  
19 28A.415.370, a career and technical education careers in education  
20 program, or an alternative route teacher certification program under  
21 chapter 28A.660 RCW;

22 (c) Provide outreach to community members who may be interested  
23 in becoming educators, including high school and college students,  
24 subject matter experts, and former military personnel and their  
25 spouses;

26 (d) Support persons interested in becoming educators by providing  
27 resources and assistance with navigating transition points on the  
28 path to a career in education; (~~and~~)

29 (e) Provide resources and technical assistance to local school  
30 districts on best hiring processes and practices; and

31 (f) Support the coordination efforts prescribed under section 4  
32 of this act.

33 (3) A person employed to provide the services described in  
34 subsection (2) of this section must be reflective of, and have an  
35 understanding of, the local community.

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