
SENATE BILL 6216

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Senators Nobles and Torres; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing a statewide network for student
2 mental and behavioral health to maintain, expand, and provide
3 oversight to Washington's school-based mental and behavioral health
4 system for children and adolescents across the state; adding new
5 sections to chapter 28A.300 RCW; adding a new section to chapter
6 28A.310 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes that many
9 children and students struggle with mental health, substance use, and
10 behavioral health challenges that impact their ability to engage in
11 learning and develop pathways to wellness and success. The mental and
12 behavioral health crisis for children and youth in the United States
13 has reached a critical point. The legislature also recognizes that
14 behavioral health and wellness supports for K-12 students in
15 Washington are fragmented, with roles and responsibilities assigned
16 across several local and state agencies. The department of health,
17 the Washington state health care authority, and the office of the
18 superintendent of public instruction all play significant but
19 distinct roles, as do regional educational service districts, local
20 school districts, and community partners. Nonetheless, schools are a
21 natural setting for prevention and early intervention efforts and

1 provide aftercare and ongoing support because they are often a hub of
2 the community where youth reside.

3 The legislature also recognizes the investments made to support
4 student behavioral health and well-being and that despite those
5 investments, school districts lack the dedicated funding and
6 coordinated supports necessary to deploy comprehensive supports and
7 direct services across the behavioral health continuum for their
8 students.

9 Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to create a
10 statewide network for student mental and behavioral health to
11 maintain, expand, and provide oversight to Washington's school-based
12 mental and behavioral health system for children and adolescents
13 across the state.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.300
15 RCW to read as follows:

16 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
17 specific purpose, the office of the superintendent of public
18 instruction shall provide state-level coordination to help schools
19 better identify and connect students to behavioral health supports in
20 school and interconnected community settings.

21 (2) At minimum, the office of the superintendent of public
22 instruction shall, collaborate with the Washington association of
23 educational service districts and other state agencies, including the
24 health care authority, the department of health, and the department
25 of children, youth, and families to:

26 (a) Develop a framework for coordinated student supports related
27 to behavioral health, including prevention and awareness, student
28 engagement, student access to school-based behavioral health
29 services, and strategic direction and goals for programming around
30 the full continuum of school-based behavioral health services;

31 (b) Coordinate with training and technical assistance entities
32 that can support local education agencies in designing, funding, and
33 implementing comprehensive student behavioral health supports based
34 on the framework established in (a) of this subsection;

35 (c) Collect and make available evidence-based practices,
36 including practices aligned with the Washington integrated student
37 supports protocol that support mental and behavioral health services
38 in school districts;

1 (d) Facilitate student access to mental and behavioral health
2 supports and reduce barriers to school-based behavioral health
3 services;

4 (e) Deploy student school-based substance use and behavioral
5 health assessment, intervention, and referral activities in alignment
6 to promising and evidence-based practices;

7 (f) Develop and maintain foundational school substance abuse
8 prevention and intervention resources to address health and well-
9 being impacts of drug use, including education to promote behaviors
10 that positively influence student behavioral health;

11 (g) Develop a review process for continuous improvement of
12 services and to monitor impact and alignment of statewide efforts
13 related to student behavioral health; and

14 (h) Support the required activities of the regional school-based
15 mental and behavioral health student assistance program established
16 in section 3 of this act.

17 (3) Subject to funds appropriated, the office of the
18 superintendent of public instruction shall support and implement
19 elements from the strategic plan developed by the strategic plan
20 advisory group established by section 1, chapter 76, Laws of 2022.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.310
22 RCW to read as follows:

23 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
24 specific purpose, the regional school-based mental and behavioral
25 health student assistance program is established. The purpose of the
26 program is to support increased regional deployment of behavioral and
27 mental health supports, including substance abuse prevention and
28 intervention services in communities with limited access to
29 behavioral and mental health services across Washington state. The
30 Washington association of educational service districts shall provide
31 overall coordination of the program across the regions.

32 (2) At a minimum, each regional program must:

33 (a) Work in conjunction with the office of the superintendent of
34 public instruction as prescribed in section 2 of this act and
35 permitted under RCW 28A.310.470 to form a statewide network for
36 student mental and behavioral health;

37 (b) Provide aligned student behavioral health student assistance
38 prevention and intervention services in schools including, but not
39 limited to:

1 (i) Supporting multidisciplinary school teams for referral
2 coordination;

3 (ii) Conducting screening, referral, and care coordination
4 activities;

5 (iii) Providing individual and group intervention services using
6 evidence-based practices;

7 (iv) Delivering mental health and substance use classroom
8 education inclusive of prevention topics, such as opiates, vaping,
9 and mental health promotion;

10 (v) Supporting behavioral health awareness campaigns; and

11 (vi) Providing and/or supporting parent and community learning
12 events.

13 (c) Support school districts in providing direct student
14 screening in both mental health and substance abuse;

15 (d) Collaborate as necessary and appropriate with regional school
16 safety centers required by RCW 28A.310.510 by sharing information and
17 student assistance resources to ensure alignment of behavioral health
18 supports across the region; and

19 (e) Support behavioral health career pathways through hiring new
20 nonlicensed staff who receive training, supervision, and internship
21 opportunities to explore career pathways in behavioral health.

22 (3) Educational service districts that are licensed as behavioral
23 health agencies may pilot the integration of telehealth services to
24 support students in need of more focused mental health treatment
25 support.

26 (4) The Washington association of education service districts
27 shall support the regional programs by:

28 (a) Establishing consistent criteria for school participation in
29 the program;

30 (b) Establishing an overall evaluation and reporting of program
31 outcomes from across the regions; and

32 (c) Coordinating statewide data collection and reporting from the
33 regional programs.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.300
35 RCW to read as follows:

36 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
37 specific purpose, the office of the superintendent of public
38 instruction shall establish a grant program to support school
39 districts in developing and implementing a plan for recognition,

1 screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in
2 students as required by RCW 28A.320.127.

3 (2) Grant funds must be prioritized for local education agencies
4 who have not been able to develop a plan for recognition, initial
5 screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress.

6 (3) To the greatest extent possible, the office of the
7 superintendent of public instruction shall pair grantees with the
8 state and regional support structures established in sections 2 and 3
9 of this act to support local education agency planning, connect local
10 education agency staff to effective training and technical
11 assistance, and ensure community-center implementation.

12 (4) Funds may be used to support training, develop model school
13 safety policies and procedures, and identify and implement best
14 practices in school-based mental and behavioral health.

--- END ---