

RCW 28A.320.290 School counselors, social workers, and psychologists—Professional collaboration. (1) Within existing resources, beginning in the 2019-20 school year, first-class school districts must provide a minimum of six hours of professional collaboration per year, preferably in person, for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists that focuses on the following: Recognizing signs of emotional or behavioral distress in students, including but not limited to indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide, screening, accessing current resources, and making appropriate referrals. Teachers may also participate in this professional collaboration, as deemed appropriate and allowed by their building administrators. School districts that have mental health centers in their area shall collaborate with local licensed mental health service providers under chapter 71.24 RCW. Those districts without a mental health center in their area shall collaborate via telephone or other remote means that allow for dialogue and discussion. By collaborating with local providers in this manner, educational staff associates get to collaborate in short but regular segments, in their own schools or near school district facilities, and school districts are not put in a position that they must obtain substitutes or otherwise expend additional funds. This local connection will also help foster a connection between school personnel and the mental health professionals in the community to whom school personnel may make referrals, in line with the legislative intent expressed throughout Engrossed Substitute House Bill No. 1336, chapter 197, Laws of 2013, to form partnerships with qualified health, mental health, and social services agencies in the community to coordinate and improve support for youth in need and the directive to the department of social and health services with respect to the provision of funds for mental health first-aid training targeted at teachers and educational staff.

(2) Second-class districts are encouraged, but not required, to collaborate and provide the professional collaboration as provided in subsection (1) of this section. [2018 c 200 § 4.]

Findings—Intent—2018 c 200: "(1) The legislature finds that students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning and development, and ultimately student success in school. The legislature further finds that the need to identify and assist students struggling with emotional and mental health needs has reached a serious level statewide. In order to prioritize students' needs first, the legislature finds that the persons most qualified in the school setting to lead the effort in addressing this epidemic are the school counselor, school social worker, and school psychologist. The legislature further finds that the knowledge-levels and skill-levels of these nonacademic professionals must be increased in order to enhance mental health-related student support services.

(2) The legislature further finds that in chapter 175, Laws of 2007, appropriate acknowledgment was given to the fact that a professional school counselor is not just a course and career guidance professional, but a certificated educator with unique qualifications and skills to address all students' academic, personal, social, and career development needs, and that school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement by supporting a safe learning environment and addressing the needs of all students through prevention and intervention programs that are part of a comprehensive

school counseling program. The legislature finds, however, that despite the language in RCW 28A.410.043 that appropriately recognizes that the role of the school counselor is multifaceted, with a focus upon students' mental health needs as well as career guidance needs, the reality in the schools is that counselor staffing levels are well below the national recommendations of one counselor to every two hundred fifty students. As a result, there are not enough counselors in the schools and many school counselors have been tasked primarily with course and career guidance responsibilities at the expense of the mental health side of school counseling. Similarly, school psychologist staffing levels are below the national recommendations of one psychologist to every five hundred to seven hundred students when providing comprehensive school psychological services, and school social worker staffing levels are below the national recommendations of one school social worker to every two hundred fifty students, or one to every fifty students with intensive needs.

(3) The legislature further finds that school counselors, social workers, and psychologists interact with students on a daily basis, thus putting them in a good position to recognize the signs of emotional or behavioral distress and make appropriate referrals. The legislature finds that individuals entering these professions need proper preparation to respond to the mental health and safety needs of students. The legislature further finds that they need ongoing professional development to address students' mental health needs and get students the help they need. The legislature further finds that Engrossed Substitute House Bill No. 1336, which became chapter 197, Laws of 2013, increased the capacity of school districts and their personnel to recognize and respond to youth in need through comprehensive planning and additional training, but that additional opportunities for collaboration on a regular and ongoing basis are in order. By providing professional collaboration opportunities with local mental health service providers at the school district level to school counselors, social workers, and psychologists, the legislature intends to take the next step toward enabling these professionals to recognize and respond with skill and confidence to the signs of emotional or behavioral distress that they observe in students and make the appropriate referrals to evidence-based behavioral health services." [2018 c 200 § 1.]

Civil liability—2018 c 200: "This act does not create any civil liability on the part of the state or any state agency, officer, employee, agent, political subdivision, or school district." [2018 c 200 § 6.]