

- SUBJECT:** Requiring a statewide study of public school counselor duties
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, with amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith
0 nays
2 absent — Dutton, Hardcastle
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, March 15 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** For — Cindy Ashby and Alma Leal, Texas Counseling Association; Martin Pena, South Texas Association of Schools; Betty Porter
Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, ch. 33, subchapter A sets forth guidelines for school counselors and counseling programs. Currently, this subchapter applies 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. 33.005, 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 538 would require the comptroller to conduct a comprehensive statewide study of public school counselors' duties. The comptroller would have to include all public school counselors in all schools, regardless of whether they were employed by school districts that received funds from the compensatory education allotment.

The comptroller would have to determine the percentage of total employment time public school counselors spent in performing duties related to assessment and testing, schedule changes, group and individual counseling, parent and teacher conferences, admission/review/dismissal meetings, and providing information concerning careers and postsecondary education. The comptroller also would have to determine the percentage of total employment time public school counselors spent performing duties described in Education Code, secs. 33.005 and 33.006; and duties not included in those sections or in the previous list of duties.

The comptroller would have to determine the public school counselor-to-student ratio statewide, and in each district at the elementary, middle school/junior high, and high school levels, and would have to submit a report to the Legislature containing the findings and any recommendations not later than January 1, 2003.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

SB 538 is needed to provide the Legislature with a comprehensive look at what school counselors in Texas actually do. Many people are surprised to learn that some 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 were employed by schools that received compensatory education allotment funds and were subject to statutory guidelines for counselor duties spent less time doing administrative and clerical tasks unrelated to guidance and more time counseling students.

This bill would allow the comptroller to conduct an independent review school counselors in Texas and provide the Legislature with a look at any deficiencies or problems, including recommendations to correct those problems or deficiencies. This would provide legislators with solid information on which to base their decisions about school counselors. It is important that the Legislature base any statutory changes about school counselors on reliable information about what school counselors actually do.

A study would provide the Legislature with recommendations to help Texas school children. 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.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

This bill would not go far enough. Significant evidence already exists that many Texas school counselors are not spending their time counseling students. The Legislature should not wait to correct this problem but rather should take immediate action. While a study would provide additional data for future actions, students in schools where counselors are not permitted to focus on guidance and counseling are suffering now. To assist these children, the Legislature should adopt the standards for counselor duties now used by districts accepting the compensatory education allotment.

SB 538
House Research Organization
page 4

NOTES: SB 518 by Lucio, which would apply portions of the Education Code relating to school counselors and counseling programs to all school districts, was set on the General State Calendar for May 16.