



The law (s. 231.15, F.S.) requires the State Board of Education to prescribe classes of service, designate the certification subject areas, and establish competencies and certification requirements for all school-based personnel. In addition, the State Board of Education must prescribe rules related to the issuance of professional, temporary, and part-time certificates. Each person employed in specified positions, including a school counselor, in a public school must hold a certificate issued by the Department of Education under these rules. School districts may employ non-certified instructional personnel to provide instructional services in the individuals' fields of specialty or to assist instructional staff members as education paraprofessionals. The rules provide for the certification of guidance and counseling (Rule 6A-4.0181, F.A.C.), school psychologists (Rule 6A-4.0311, F.A.C.), and school social workers (Rule 6A-4.035, F.A.C.).

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1.** The bill creates the "Student Services Act for the Prevention of Violence in Education."

**Section 2.** The bill creates a 5-year pilot program in Sarasota, St. Johns, Broward, Okaloosa, Lake, and Duval counties to enable school districts in these counties to provide students with skills in conflict resolution, anger management, building effective interpersonal relationships, and behavioral self-controls, such as impulse control, self-monitoring, and internal achievement motivation. The bill states that these skills are essential to reduce disruptive and dangerous behavior in the classroom and to increase academic performance.

**Section 3.** The bill provides legislative intent language related to recent societal changes and the role of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, as well as student-services personnel needed to implement research-based initiatives to reduce violence, enhance school safety, and improve student performance.

**Section 4.** The purpose of the act is to allocate incentive funding to school districts for adequate student-services personnel to:

- Reduce disciplinary referrals significantly, as well as the number of suspensions and expulsions.
- Increase the amount of time teachers can focus on teaching rather than on managing disruptive and dangerous students, as well as promote consistency in the application of disciplinary strategies by school staff.
- Increase the confidence of parents and communities that schools are safe and effective places for learning.

Also, the allocation is for these personnel to perform the following activities with respect to students:

- provide skills to find positive solutions to conflict;
- teach acceptance of more personal responsibility;
- increase the ability to stay on task;
- provide the skills necessary to interact positively with peers and those in authority;
- help in dealing with violent peers; and
- improve the use of critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills.

**Section 5.** The bill provides that the Commissioner of Education must allocate an incentive award for each participating school district. The incentive award is derived from funds appropriated in the General Appropriations Act for this purpose,. The award must be made in an amount equal to five

percent of the district's 1998-1999 expenditures on salary and benefits for social workers, psychologists, and guidance counselors.

**Section 6.** The effectiveness of the bill's provisions must be measured by the core elements of the state school report card, as evidenced by:

- reduced referrals to the school office;
- reduced truancy;
- fewer in-school and out-of-school suspensions;
- fewer drug related incidents;
- reduced weapon-related offenses;
- reduced incidents of violence;
- increased student academic performance; and
- increased parent and school staff satisfaction.

**Section 7.** The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 1999.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

##### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

##### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

#### **V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**

##### **A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

##### **B. Private Sector Impact:**

To the extent that the provisions of the bill result in the availability of needed services, students may benefit.

##### **C. Government Sector Impact:**

The Department of Education estimates that \$5.5 million will be needed annually to implement the pilot programs in the bill. These funds will be used to employ approximately 100 additional student services staff members. The department noted, however, that the estimate would be approximately \$3.2 million on an annual basis if district-reported expenditures are used as a

basis. The department also noted that the number of additional staff would concomitantly decrease if the district information was used.

According to the Department of Education, there is currently an allocation of 1,204 student services personnel for the 468,415 students enrolled in the 580 schools in the six counties identified in the bill (Sarasota, St. Johns, Broward, Okaloosa, Lake, and Duval). These personnel are as follows:

- 164 school social workers;
- 171 school psychologists; and
- 869 school counselors.

The department provided the following information for the six counties:

- Student to school social worker ratio- 1 to 2,856;
- Student to school psychologist ratio- 1 to 2739; and
- Student to school counselor ratio- 1 to 539.

Each school social worker and school psychologist serve approximately 3.5 schools.

#### **VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

#### **VII. Related Issues:**

Specific Appropriation 109 in SB 2500 (1st Engrossed) provides \$70,350,000 for safe schools. The funds are allocated according to a funding formula (two-thirds must be based on the latest official Florida Crime Index provided by the Department of Law Enforcement and one-third must be based on each district's share of the state's total weighted student enrollment. Proviso language defines the activities of safe schools to include: (1) after school programs for middle school students; (2) other improvements to enhance the learning environment, including implementation of conflict resolution strategies; (3) alternative school programs for adjudicated youth; and (4) other improvements to make the school a safe place to learn. Each district must determine, based on a review of its existing programs and priorities, how much of its total allocation to use for each authorized safe schools activity.

While s. 231.15, F.S., and the related administrative rules refer to the certification of certain personnel (e.g., guidance and counseling, school psychologists, and school social workers), the bill does not make this distinction.

#### **VIII. Amendments:**

None.