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Good afternoon Chairman, Committee Members. I am speaking in favor of SB278 to increase school social workers in our public schools. The main argument for increasing school social workers, as stated in the bill, is to improve student attendance, reduce bullying, and impact other elements of the school system and its students. In short, this bill is targeted at improving *school climate*. School climate is a highly powerful element in the success of students which is not only an area to gauge school improvement under the Federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015), but is also cited in scholarly research as a key indicator and predictor of student engagement and achievement in schools.

The importance of school climate is highlighted in *The Framework for Safe and Successful Schools* (2013), a set of guidelines created by the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the School Social Work Association of America, and endorsed by over 100 professional organizations and scholars. School-employed mental health providers, like social workers, counselors, and school psychologists, are key personnel in developing and ensuring a positive and effective school climate by tending to the needs of students beyond the academic realm. Here are some impacts of improved school climate and other services provided by school-employed mental health providers:

- Improvements in school climate have been associated with *increases in student reading, writing, and mathematics performance* (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004; Spier, Cai, & Osher, 2007; Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendziora, 2007).
- Interventions to increase student engagement in school have been shown to *reduce high school dropout* (Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998)
- School mental health programs have been shown to improve educational outcomes by *reducing out-of-school suspensions*, increasing promotions to the next grade level (Kang-Yi, Mandell, & Hadley, 2013), *decreasing behavior problems* (Wolpert et al., 2011), *decreasing absences, decreasing discipline referrals, and increasing test scores* (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).

- School-employed mental health providers help ensure the safety of all students by *reducing school violence, bullying, and harassment* (Bear & Minke, 2006; Brock, Lazarus, & Jimerson, 2002).

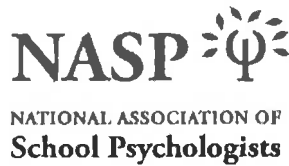
I am a school psychologist in Eugene. Like school social workers, I am a school-employed mental health provider, and I see the impacts that school climate can have on a child. A child who feels welcome, safe, and genuinely cared-for by the school is a child who wants to attend...who wants to do the work...who wants to participate and be part of the school community. All of these factors will increase student achievement and graduation rates, and all of these factors can be influenced and supported by school-employed mental health providers: school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors. But there are not enough of us. A full-time school psychologist in my district may be assigned three or four schools. Let me tell you about just *one* of my elementary schools: it has over 500 students, over 50% of whom qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. Some of my students live in homeless shelters, or have incarcerated parents, or live in homes afflicted with drug use. These precious children need support to be successful in school. They need professionals who can focus on improving the school experience – like school-based mental health professionals. But I can only be in that building one or two days per week...and the counselor can only be there half-time...and there is no school social worker...for 500 students.

By increasing the numbers of school-based mental health providers in Oregon, we can make a start at improving the school experience for these 500 children, and more. Therefore, with reference to SB278 Section 3 (1), the proposed pilot program to distribute moneys to school districts to hire new social workers (\$20,000,000, as stated in Section 7), I respectfully request that the committee allow districts to use these funds to increase the numbers of *social workers, school psychologists, and counselors*. The daily reality of schools makes it clear that there is a shortage of *all* these school-based mental health professionals, and increasing their numbers will improve outcomes for students and school systems.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you would like more information or have additional questions about the value of increasing our school-employed mental health providers in the state of Oregon. Thank you for your time and attention.

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School Social Work
Association of America

Effective School Staffing Model: Teaming School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) support the mission of all schools to help students reach their fullest potential so they may become contributing members of society. To accomplish this mission, schools must ensure every student has access to a rigorous curriculum and a team of highly qualified professionals such as effective teachers and strong school leaders who can help create safe and supportive school environments. Essential components to the educational team are school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers who help students overcome individual barriers to learning. The presence of each of these personnel, and improved student access to the assistance they provide, are essential to ensuring school and student success.

ASCA, NASP, and SSWAA understand there are real challenges in providing students with the access to assistance they need. Budgetary constraints, local site management, cultural and community norms, personnel shortages in certain geographical areas, and confusion about professional roles may have an impact on local school district and state policies and hiring configurations. Because we acknowledge that the ideal staffing model may not always be achievable currently, ASCA, NASP, and SSWAA have established a strong working relationship through which we advocate together for shared policy priorities and a larger federal investment to support increased numbers of school counseling and mental health professionals.

One example of successful collaboration and advocacy is the *Framework for Safe and Successful Schools* (www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework), endorsed by over 100 organizations and scholars. This policy document stresses the importance of the supports and services that school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers provide collectively, while highlighting the specific and unique skill set of each profession. We strongly encourage you to use this document to strengthen these best practices in your state and local school districts.

The national organizations collectively will continue to promote the unique roles of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers and will support state and local affiliate efforts toward appropriate hiring models that recognize the role and importance of each of these professionals.

ASCA supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career and social/emotional development so they achieve success in schools and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. ASCA provides professional development, publications and other resources, research and advocacy to professional school counselors around the globe.

NASP represents more than 25,000 school psychologists who work with students, educators, and families to support the academic achievement, positive behavior, and mental health of all students. School psychologists work with parents and educators to help shape individual and system-wide supports that provide the necessary prevention, early identification, and intervention services to ensure that all students have access to the mental health, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic supports they need to be successful in school.

SSWAA promotes the professional of school social work to enhance the educational experience of students and their families. SSWAA offers continuing professional development, supports best practices through research and evaluation, and maintains a strong public policy and advocacy presence. SSWAA supports social workers in creating linkages among schools, families, and communities to address barriers to student success and in serving the mental health needs of children and their families through early identification, prevention, intervention, counseling and support.

Roles of School-Employed Mental Health Professionals

Many professionals within a school help to support students' positive mental health. This includes **school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers**... who serve in critical leadership roles in terms of school safety, positive school climate, and providing school-based mental health services. Their training and expertise help link mental health, behavior, environmental factors (e.g., family, classroom, school, community), instruction, and learning. **Each of these professionals helps to create school environments that are safe, supportive, and conducive to learning. Each may deliver similar services such as counseling, social-emotional skill instruction, and consultation with families and teachers; however, each profession has its own unique focus based upon its specializations, which result in different, albeit interrelated, services.**

School counselors. Have a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling. School counselors are generally the first school-employed mental health professional to interact with students as they commonly are involved in the provision of universal learning supports to the whole school population. School counselors have specialized knowledge of curriculum and instruction and help screen students for the basic skills needed for successful transition from cradle to college and career. School counselors focus on helping students' address their academic, personal/social, and career development goals and needs by designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. School counselors work to promote safe learning environments for all members of the school community and regularly monitor and respond to behavior issues that impact school climate, such as bullying, student interpersonal struggles, and student-teacher conflicts. Effective school counseling programs are a collaborative effort between the school counselor, teachers, families, and other educators to create an environment promoting student achievement, active engagement, equitable access to educational opportunities, and a rigorous curriculum for all students.

School psychologists. Have a minimum of a specialist-level degree (60 graduate semester hour minimum) in school psychology, which combines the disciplines of psychology and education. They typically have extensive knowledge of learning, motivation, behavior, childhood disabilities, assessment, evaluation, and school law. School psychologists specialize in analyzing complex student and school problems and selecting and implementing appropriate evidence-based interventions to

improve outcomes at home and school. School psychologists consult with teachers and parents to provide coordinated services and supports for students struggling with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral problems, and those experiencing anxiety, depression, emotional trauma, grief, and loss. They are regular members of school crisis teams and collaborate with school administrators and other educators to prevent and respond to crises. They have specialized training in conducting risk and threat assessments designed to identify students at-risk for harming themselves or others. School psychologists' training in evaluation, data collection, and interpretation can help ensure that decisions made about students, the school system, and related programs and learning supports are based on appropriate evidence.

School social workers. Have master's degrees in social work. They have special expertise in understanding family and community systems and linking students and their families with the community services that are essential for promoting student success. School social workers' training includes specialized preparation in cultural diversity, systems theory, social justice, risk assessment and intervention, consultation and collaboration, and clinical intervention strategies to address the mental health needs of students. They work to remedy barriers to learning created as a result of poverty, inadequate health care, and neighborhood violence. School social workers often focus on providing supports to vulnerable populations of students that have a high risk for truancy and dropping out of school, such as homeless and foster children, migrant populations, students transitioning between school and treatment programs or the juvenile justice system, or students experiencing domestic violence. They work closely with teachers, administrators, parents, and other educators to provide coordinated interventions and consultation designed to keep students in school and help their families access the supports needed to promote student success.

Excerpted from:

Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). *A framework for safe and successful schools* [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.