

SB17-068: Bill Jaeger Testimony to House Education on School Counselors Early Support For Students

Thank you Madame Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Bill Jaeger and I am the Vice President of Early Childhood Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 17-068 and thank you to the sponsors for bringing this bill forward.

Bill Summary

Within the Colorado Department of Education, there are two competitive grant programs: the School Counselor Corps Grant Program and the School Health Professional Grant Program. These ensure early support for students in secondary schools. This legislation would expand eligibility for elementary schools to apply for funding. Since 2008, the school counselor corps program has increased the availability of school-based counseling within secondary schools. The school health professional grant program is funded with marijuana tax cash funds and grantees receive funds to hire school nurses, social workers, school counselors, or psychologists. These professionals implement evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs. Currently both of these programs are limited to secondary school applicants. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends one school nurse for 750 generally healthy students. For the 2015-2016 school year, Colorado's ratio for school nurses was one nurse per 1,469 students.

Support

This bill appropriately ensures that elementary schools have access to funding opportunities to hire school counselors and school health professionals. These professionals can help ensure that children get a healthy and strong start in school. By expanding the accessibility to these professionals for students of all ages, we can support the value of prevention, which can lead to children achieving better health and educational outcomes at a lower overall cost.

In education and in health, we know that prevention is a far more efficient use of resources. Getting kids on the path to success **early** helps achieve better outcomes in the long term at a lower overall cost. This bill wisely allows elementary schools to access the same grant program as other public schools. Right now, state statute precludes local districts from even making this decision, even if they thought their greatest need and their greatest return on investment came from an approach focused on prevention and early intervention. This change would allow local districts to determine where their greatest needs are rather than state statute dictating it. By expanding the availability to these professionals for all ages of students, we can work toward a system that recognizes the value of prevention and aims to achieve better health and educational outcomes for kids at a lower overall cost.

Effectiveness

Counseling programs in elementary years have been associated with reductions in children's hyperactive, defiant, and aggressive behaviors and are also associated with improvements in parents' behavior management skills.¹ Elementary counselor programs, in particular, are associated with reductions in teacher reports of student misbehavior and adding additional counselors has been associated with boys' academic achievement in particular.²

Thank you members of the committee for your support of this bill and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

¹ <http://jsc.montana.edu/articles/v8n36.pdf>

² Reback, R. (2010). Schools' mental health services and young children's emotions, behavior, and learning. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*; Carrell, S.E. & Hoekstra, M. (2014). Are school counselors an effective educational input? *Economic Letters*, 125, 66-69.