

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 37

52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015

Tracking Number: .197299.4

Short Title: Social Workers in Certain Schools

Sponsor(s): Senator Michael Padilla

Analyst: Travis Dulany

Date: February 19, 2015

Bill Summary:

SB 37 makes an appropriation and adds a new section to the *Public School Code* to create the Social Workers in Schools Pilot Project. Among its provisions, the bill:

- prescribes activities of the project, including the duties of social workers employed under the project, among them:
 - providing counseling, crisis intervention, and prevention programs to help students address social and psychological issues that may inhibit their academic progress and lead to truancy or dropping out of school; and
 - providing professional services to allow teacher time to focus on teaching; and
- requires the Public Education Department (PED) to:
 - administer the project;
 - rank the foreclosure rates of areas designated by zip code in which 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches;
 - prioritize funding according to this ranking; and
 - report annually by December 1 to the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) on the progress of the project.

Fiscal Impact:

\$3.5 million is appropriated from the General Fund to PED for expenditure in FY 16 to fund the Social Workers in Schools Pilot Project. Unexpended or unencumbered funds remaining at the end of FY 16 shall revert to the General Fund.

Fiscal Issues:

According to PED:

- school personnel salaries are determined at the local level; and
- using an average social worker salary of \$50,245 per year, as well as a benefit load of 30 percent, the appropriation contained within SB 37 would fund approximately 53 social workers.

Substantive Issues:

A number of organizations provide foreclosure data, including the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and RealtyTrac, a private, for-profit company; however, not all foreclosure data are broken down by zip code, and foreclosure data tend to be based on the number of housing units rather than per capita, which is the measure required under SB 37. It is therefore difficult to identify exactly which zip code(s) would be targeted under SB 37 at this time.

According to PED, social workers:

- are usually hired by the school district or contracted through a formal agreement with a community agency to provide behavioral and mental health services to students;
- can provide in-school services such as case management, individual or group counseling, referrals, crisis intervention, and prevention programs to students; and
- can support students, parents, teachers, and other school staff by addressing a variety of behavioral health issues.

Background:

During the 2014 interim, the LESC heard testimony from the sponsor of SB 37, as well as several social workers, regarding the idea of social workers in schools pilot project. This testimony discussed the nature of a social worker's duties, including truancy enforcement, involvement in individualized education programs, and crisis management. The testimony also provided examples of daily situations that a social worker may encounter, such as diffusing a situation caused by a student bringing a knife to school, or helping a student cope with the emotional damage of a sexual assault.

The testimony further explained that many of these situations can occur simultaneously, which is a strain on a school's social worker resources. To provide some relief, one of the important duties for a social worker is to educate classroom teachers on signs of mental illness or abuse, according to one of the social workers who testified to the LESC. Additionally, testimony to the LESC noted that social workers may be able to help save money by connecting students and families to the resources necessary to keep students healthy and successful. Finally, a social worker reported that a considerable amount of research indicates that engaging families in the educational process – something that social workers do – improves attendance, reduces behavioral issues, and allows families to better support the student.

Committee Referrals:

SEC/SFC

Related Bills:

SB 33 *Social Worker Loan for Service Act*

SB 588 *Loans to Social Workers & Psychologists*

HB 134 *Social Work Practice Act Changes*