

SB23-004 EMPLOYMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED THERAPISTS

(Concerning employment of certain school mental health professionals)

Senators Marchman & Jaquez Lewis; Representatives Young & Michaelson Jenet

AT A GLANCE

In 2021, Children's Hospital Colorado declared a youth mental health state of emergency.

Under current law, for a therapist to work in a school, they must be professionally licensed as a special service provider (SSP) by CDE.

The bill allows school districts to employ therapists who are not licensed by CDE but hold a Colorado license for their profession.

THE CURRENT ISSUE WITH COLORADO STATUTE

- For a therapist to work in a school, they must be licensed as a special service provider (SSP) by CDE. Therapists are licensed through DORA.
- SSPs licensed through CDE include school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. SSPs are not licensed to provide therapy to students.
- To provide therapy to students in schools, outside mental health organizations are contracting with therapists and creating complicated MOUs. This is burdensome and varies from contract to contract.

HOW THIS BILL CHANGES STATUTE

- The bill allows school districts to employ therapists directly.
- Fingerprint-based background checks will be required of the therapists.
- Since services are being provided on site during the school day, they are considered educational records, covered under FERPA. This allows school staff and families access to relevant student-centered information.
- Minor consent to therapy for students aged 12-17 will ensure student privacy.
- School districts are not required to hire school-based therapists but will have the option to supplement mental health services already offered at schools by SSPs.

17% of Colorado high school students have seriously considered suicide. ¹

- 15.3% of Coloradans reported eight or more days of poor mental health in the previous 30 days.¹
- 15.3% of Colorado children *need* mental health care.¹
- 16.0% of Colorado high schoolers reported binge drinking.

- Increasing understanding, early identification of mental health problems, and improving access to services leads to better educational outcomes.
- Colorado has workforce issues among all mental healthcare professionals.
- Providing therapy to students during the school day improves accessibility.
- Colorado is experiencing a workforce shortage among mental health care professionals, both SSPs and therapists.

SPECIAL SERVICE PROVIDER (SSP) ROLES	SCHOOL-BASED THERAPIST ROLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching a lesson on appropriate ways to respond to bullying • Individual and group counseling • Training in problem-solving and coping skills • Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) • Implementing School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBIS) • Conducting Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) • Coordinating community resources and services • Counseling and educating parents related to their child’s disability • Conducting formal evaluations under IDEA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling related to grief due to the loss of a family member • Counseling related to substance abuse • Treating individual psychiatric disorders including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Depression ○ Anxiety ○ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ○ Bipolar Disorder

NATE THOMPSON - DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, & BEHAVIOR SERVICES - Littleton Public Schools



“We highly value the ability to hire mental health professionals who have DORA licensure but may not have a CDE license. **As someone who personally holds both CDE and DORA licenses, I am familiar with the requirements and see this as a logical way to help address the growing staffing needs for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.**”

ERIN GRISANTI - LICENSED MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST, ADAMS12 FIVE STAR



“Given my unique educational background and previous work experience, I overcame legislative hurdles to maintain my position supporting students, families, and teachers in my school community. **I am aware, however, that many other mental health professionals will not be able to overcome such barriers without a change in current state legislation.** Due to the importance of increased access to mental health support in our schools across the state, I support SB23-004.”

¹ Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, 2017, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2017