



To: Representative Barbara McLachlan, Representative Donald Valdez, and members of the House Education Committee
From: Katie Brown, M.A. School Counselor, Sunset Park Elementary, Pueblo City Schools and Region 3
Representative for the Colorado School Counselor Association
Date: April 11, 2019
Re: Support of SB19-010 Professional Behavioral Health Services for Schools

The Colorado School Counselor Association (CSCA) would like to submit this letter of support for SB 19-010 and thank Rep. McLachlan and Rep. Valdez for bringing this bill forward.

Expansion of the School Health Professionals Grant Program to allow grant funding to be used for behavioral health care services, including screenings, counseling, therapy, referrals to community organizations, and training for students and staff on behavioral health issues is desperately needed in Colorado's schools. A team of school health professionals including school counselors is needed in so many more schools to help students with all the pressures they face.

School counselors recognize and respond to the need for mental health and behavioral prevention, early intervention and crisis services for all students. School counselors are prepared to address barriers and to assess ways to maximize students' success in schools, communities and their family structure by offering education, prevention, and crisis and short-term intervention until the student is connected with available community resources. Unmet mental health needs can be a significant obstacle to student academic, career and social/emotional development and even compromise school safety. Schools are often one of the first places where mental health crises and needs of students are recognized and initially addressed. Most students in need do not receive adequate mental health supports. Students of color and those from families with low income are at greater risk for mental health needs but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services

Our schools and Colorado students need more behavioral health professionals. Creating systems in our schools that support healthy development of social and emotional skills should be our highest priority and we are not able to do that without the help of the legislature.

Over the course of my eight years in education I have marveled at the strength and resilience of the children who have crossed my path. Through these crises, I have learned first-hand that a child's ability to progress in school, create connections with their peers, or function in a classroom, are highly dependent on whether or not they have at least one adult they trust. For some students that adult may be whoever they love and live with, but for too many others they don't have that adult support in their home lives and look to the school to fill that void. I do what I can with my students, but my caseload of students is 481.

Additionally, the option of districts to contract with community agencies to bring in clinical therapists expands services to our most vulnerable students. It reduces the barriers for families to get their children to appointments and allows students to receive treatment for very serious mental health concerns. Our student's academic growth and potential can only be realized when social emotional skills and mental health needs are supported by

qualified mental health professionals. Also, by providing this increased access, the stigma of needing mental health support will start to decrease. The expansion of the School Health Professionals Grant Program in SB 19-010 will also help our schools get closer to the recommended ratio of 1 counselor to 250 students.

Students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning and development. Because of school counselors' training and position, we are uniquely qualified to provide education, prevention, intervention and referral services to students and their families. Although school counselors do not provide long-term mental health therapy in schools, they provide a comprehensive school counseling program designed to meet the developmental needs of all students. Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter of support. Please support SB 19-010 today as it is so important to the students of Colorado.

Note: CSCA is happy to answer any questions or provide additional information through our lobbyist, Tonette Salazar at tonette@t2salazar.com.