



## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

# FISCAL NOTE

HOUSE BILL NO. 1665

PRINTER'S NO. 2762

PRIME SPONSOR: Steele

### COST / (SAVINGS)

FUND	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
General Fund	\$0	\$107,000; See fiscal impact

### SUMMARY:

House Bill 1665 amends the Public School Code of 1949 to require each school entity to develop and implement a written comprehensive school counseling plan.

### ANALYSIS:

House Bill 1665 amends the Public School Code of 1949 by adding Article XIII-F – Comprehensive School Counseling Services. This new article requires school entities to develop and implement a written comprehensive school counseling plan that ensures student services are coordinated in a manner that provides comprehensive and developmental support to all students.

A school entity is defined as a school district, intermediate unit, charter school, cyber charter school, regional charter school, or area career and technical school.

House Bill 1665 includes detailed provisions pertaining to the requirements, components, and contents of the comprehensive school counseling plan. Most notably, the plan must be implemented by a Pennsylvania-certified school counselor or counseling team working within each school in the school entity. A school counselor shall not spend more than 20 percent of their time on administrative activities (e.g., coordinating state assessments or developing schedules) and must spend at least 80 percent of their time providing direct and indirect services (e.g., academic advisement or providing social and emotional skills).

Each school entity is responsible for posting its plan on its website. The Department of Education (PDE) is required to employ at least one certified school counselor and to monitor each school entity to ensure they develop and implement a comprehensive school counseling plan. PDE shall also provide guidance and technical assistance to support equitable access to school counseling services.

House Bill 1665 would take effect immediately.

### FISCAL IMPACT:

House Bill 1665 requires PDE to employ at least one individual who is certified as a school counselor and to provide a multilevel system of support, guidance, and technical assistance to school entities to assist with providing comprehensive and equitable school counseling services. PDE staff indicated that these additional responsibilities are estimated to require a counselor position at a total cost of \$160,000 and an administrative officer position at a total cost of \$107,000. Currently, the counselor position is filled.

The total cost that this legislation would impose on school entities is currently indeterminant. The bill's fiscal impact on school entities will depend upon the contents of the locally developed comprehensive school counseling plan and the level of school counseling services already offered by the school entity. The bill's requirements are a more detailed and counselor specific version of the comprehensive student services plan required under Chapters 12 and 339 of Title 22 (Education) of the Pennsylvania Code.

House Bill 1665 does not mandate a specific counselor to student staffing ratio. If a school entity's plan requires additional counselors to implement, an analysis of the Professional Personnel Individual Staff data published by PDE shows that the median salary of an elementary or secondary school counselor was about \$76,000 in 2022/23.

The General Assembly has appropriated, from state and federal revenue sources, \$95 million in 2022/23 and \$90 million in 2023/24 for school mental health grants. School entities are required to prioritize investing these funds into the Level/Tier 1 baseline criteria established by the School Safety and Security Committee (SSSC) before spending on the next levels of need (see Sections 1315-B and 1315.1-B of the Public School Code of 1949). After the 2023 update, the SSSC's Level 1 baseline criteria for behavioral health related to school counselors states that a "school entity has a school counseling program in place to ensure all students have access to qualified services, when needed."

According to the 2022/23 school mental health survey conducted by the SSSC pursuant to Section 1305.1-B of the Public School Code of 1949, 90% of school entities had at least one school counselor, 88% of school entities had a school counselor assigned to each school building, and 27% of school entities had one school counselor for every 250 students. Note, the definition of school entity for the survey is more expansive than the definition in House Bill 1665 in that it also includes approved private schools, chartered schools for the education of the deaf or the blind, and private residential rehabilitative institutions.

According to the most recent expenditure data reported in the Annual Financial Reports, school entities spent a total of \$809.5 million on guidance services in 2021/22, which was 2.3% of current expenditures by school entities that year.

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**DATE:** March 25, 2024

*Estimates are calculated using the best information available. Actual costs and revenue impact incurred may vary from estimates.*