

CHAPTER 86

EDUCATION - PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SENATE BILL 26-153

BY SENATOR(S) Kolker and Simpson, Cutter, Frizzell, Gonzales J., Jodeh, Kipp, Lindstedt, Marchman, Rodriguez, Sullivan, Wallace, Coleman;
also REPRESENTATIVE(S) Bacon and Martinez, Clifford, Duran, Garcia, Goldstein, Hamrick, Jackson, Lindsay, McCormick, Nguyen, Phillips, Rydin, Stewart K., McCluskie.

AN ACT

CONCERNING GRADUATE ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A LICENSED SCHOOL COUNSELOR, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, ESTABLISHING A MINIMUM NUMBER OF CREDIT HOURS REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL SERVICES LICENSURE WITH A SCHOOL COUNSELOR ENDORSEMENT.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

SECTION 1. Legislative declaration. (1) The general assembly finds and declares that:

(a) Schools play a critical role in preparing students for academic achievement, postsecondary education, and participation in the workforce;

(b) Students' ability to succeed academically is often influenced by personal, developmental, and social challenges that may affect school engagement and learning;

(c) The social, emotional, and behavioral health needs of students in Colorado schools have increased significantly in recent years. Failing to address these needs affects students' academic success, school attendance, safety, and long-term well-being.

(d) School counselors provide essential services to students and schools by identifying and confronting obstacles to student learning and supporting students with social and emotional development, academic planning, and career and postsecondary readiness;

(e) In many schools, particularly in rural and smaller districts and underserved

Capital letters or bold & italic numbers indicate new material added to existing law; dashes through words or numbers indicate deletions from existing law and such material is not part of the act.

communities, a licensed school counselor is often the only readily available professional whose preparation includes training in counseling practices and student development;

(f) School counselors are increasingly called upon to perform risk and safety assessments, provide short-term counseling and crisis intervention when tragedy strikes a school, coordinate services with families and community providers, and support students experiencing trauma and other behavioral health challenges;

(g) Because of these responsibilities, it is important that individuals seeking licensure as school counselors receive comprehensive graduate-level preparation that includes coursework in counseling practices, student development, and strategies to help students experiencing stress, behavioral challenges, or other barriers to academic success;

(h) National standards for counselor preparation, including those established by recognized accrediting bodies, typically require graduate programs of at least sixty semester credit hours and include coursework related to mental health counseling, assessment, and crisis response; and

(i) Establishing minimum graduate credit requirements will help ensure that school counselors entering Colorado schools possess the knowledge and skills necessary to support students effectively.

(2) Therefore, the general assembly declares that establishing minimum graduate-level preparation requirements for licensed school counselors is necessary to provide effective student services, promote safe and supportive learning environments, and ensure that students across Colorado have access to well-prepared school counseling professionals.

SECTION 2. In Colorado Revised Statutes, 22-60.5-210, **amend** (1)(a)(I)(B) as follows:

22-60.5-210. Types of special services licenses issued - term.

(1) The department of education is designated as the sole agency authorized to issue the following types of special services licenses to persons of good moral character:

(a) **Initial special services license.**

(I) The department of education, in its discretion, may issue an initial special services license to any applicant who:

(B) Has met the standards of the state board of education concerning academic and professional preparation, ~~and~~ experience, and performance, as appropriate for the subject matter area or areas for which ~~such~~ THE initial special services license is to be endorsed; EXCEPT THAT, TO QUALIFY FOR SPECIAL SERVICES LICENSURE WITH A SCHOOL COUNSELOR ENDORSEMENT, AN APPLICANT MUST HOLD, FROM AN ACCREDITED INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION, A MASTER'S DEGREE OR HIGHER

IN SCHOOL COUNSELING THAT CONSISTS OF AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT GRADUATE SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS.

SECTION 3. Safety clause. The general assembly finds, determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety or for appropriations for the support and maintenance of the departments of the state and state institutions.

Approved: May 4, 2026