

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

QUESTION

1. Is there a request for the reduction of counsellors from 1: 1500 to 1; 1800?

ANSWER

School counsellors should be undertaking the following roles;

- a) Assessment of students to determine areas of special need or strength and / or disability;
- b) Support and direction of teachers to provide appropriate and relevant learning programs;
- c) Liaison and communication with other experts and outside agencies to provide additional diagnosis and support;
- d) Provision of therapeutic / counselling support to students with mental health issues and / or life crisis; and
- e) Support and direction for families of children with special needs and those experiencing distressing situations.

The current allocation of 1 counsellor to 1500 students depletes the role's integrity. Counsellors are unable to fulfil their responsibilities as the demands are too great both qualitatively and quantitatively? The request to reduce the load to 1 counsellor to 800 students would enable far greater access for students to the facilities / supports they require.

A further enhancement, as suggested by the Public School's Forum, is the creation of a new position that could address d) and e). With little time to train more school counsellors to the level currently expected by the NSW Department of Education and Training (9 years), a lesser qualified person with a Social Welfare degree could undertake some of the counselling / therapy roles thus enabling the counsellor to concentrate their time on a), b) and c). This would have the effect of addressing the current and looming shortage of fully trained counsellors and provide additional services to the children and young people in government schools.

QUESTION

2. How many counsellors exist at the moment?

ANSWER

790 school counsellors including 72 District Guidance Officers who have a direct workload for students that is approximately half or 2 ½ days per week.

QUESTION

3. You spoke about fulfilling the legal responsibility (of Government or Department of Education and Training) to provide appropriate levels of funding. Is that the general principles of legal responsibilities or are there specific legal responsibilities that those departments and the Government need to fulfil?

ANSWER

Members of the Public Schools Principals Forum believe that the NSW Government through the Department of Education and Training is not fulfilling its legal responsibilities under the Discrimination Act (1992) with specific reference to the Education Standards (2005)

We believe that there are three areas of breach;

- a) Participation
- b) Curriculum; and
- c) Provision of special services
- d)

For a full explanation and examples of these breaches please refer to the submission by the Public School Principals forum dated June 2010.

It is the intention of the PSPF to progress these matters through a formal complaint the Human Rights Commission under the covenant of the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Individual cases will be pursued by the NSW Disabilities Discrimination Legal centre and supported by the PSPF as expert witnesses.