HOUSE BILL NO. 626

AN ACT TO PROVIDE AN ALLOTMENT OF FUNDS UNDER THE MINIMUM EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF EMPLOYING SCHOOL COUNSELORS; TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL ALLOTMENT OF FUNDS IN EACH SUBSEQUENT FISCAL YEAR UNTIL EACH SCHOOL HAS EMPLOYED AT LEAST ONE COUNSELOR; TO AUTHORIZE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS TO ASSIGN SCHOOL COUNSELORS TO PARTICULAR SCHOOLS; TO AUTHORIZE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO EMPLOY A SUPERVISOR OF COUNSELORS AND TO ISSUE REGULATIONS REGARDING THE SERVICES OF SUCH COUNSELORS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) Beginning with the 2001-2002 school year, in addition to other funds allotted under the minimum education program, each school district shall be allotted sufficient funding to employ one (1) school counselor for each five hundred (500) students in average daily attendance, with funding for an additional school counselor to be allotted per fiscal year until each school in the school district has one (1) state-funded counselor. However, until the time that there is a counselor in every school at a counselor:student ratio of 1:500 or greater, the annual appropriation for counselors shall not be reduced.

(2) The State Department of Education may increase the number of positions funded each year beyond the above requirements as money is made available.

(3) The assignment of the school counselors to the particular schools shall be at the discretion of the local school district with the following restrictions:

(a) The counselor:student ratio shall be no less than 1:500, or one (1) counselor per school building, whichever is greater.
(b) No individual shall be employed as a school counselor without appropriate training and certification as a school counselor by the State Department of Education.

(4) To qualify for minimum program funding, school counselors shall be full-time professional personnel, shall spend at least seventy-five percent (75%) of work time in a direct counseling relationship with pupils, and shall devote no more than one-fourth (1/4) of the work day to administrative activities which are counselor related.

(5) Nothing in this act shall prohibit any school district from employing with local funds more school counselors than are provided for in this act.

(6) The State Department of Education shall employ a supervisor of counselors who holds certification as a school counselor. The supervisor's responsibilities shall include the oversight of the new school counseling programs as well as existing programs.

(7) The State Department of Education may adopt rules and regulations regarding the activities of the school counselor, and the school counselor is authorized to perform such services that are not inconsistent with the rules and regulations.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.