

Schools Seek Funds To Add Counselors

California has fewest per student of any state
— move seen as way to counter violence

By Jennifer Kerr
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO — The state's top school official wants to spend an additional \$60 million annually to put more counselors in California's public schools to try to avoid student violence.

California last year had the worst counselor-to-student ratio in the country, state schools Superintendent Delaine Eastin said. She wants to bring that ratio up to the national average.

Eastin made the proposal yesterday as she and Attorney General Bill Lockyer announced that 34 school districts will be dividing \$10.8 million to improve school safety by putting more police on campuses.

Both officials said last month's shootings at two San Diego County high schools underscore the need for additional school safety efforts — particularly by providing kids with more concerned adults to talk with about their problems.

"We have worked hard since Columbine, but we clearly have more to do," Eastin said, referring

to the nation's worst school shooting, which took place on April 20, 1999, in a Colorado high school. Ten students and one teacher were killed by two student gunmen, who then killed themselves.

In response to Columbine and a string of school shootings that preceded that, California lawmakers created and enhanced a number of programs aimed at giving schools more resources to prevent and address violence.

An Assembly committee planned a hearing to talk about the programs and seek ideas for new efforts.

Among the programs was the School Community Policing Partnership Program, whose latest recipients were announced yesterday. That program gives districts up to \$325,000 each to be spent over three years to develop partnerships with law enforcement agencies.

Lockyer said putting police on campuses on a regular basis not only improves security, but also gives students a "long-term counselor, friend and role model."

Eastin agreed that police at



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schools can help students.

"Children have too few people they can go to to converse and to connect," she said.

However, she said California public schools also need to restore the counselors dumped during budget problems of the past two decades. Last year, California schools had one counselor for every 979 students, the worst ratio in the country.

Eastin is proposing that the state spend an additional \$60 million each year for five years to bring California up to the national average of one counselor per 561 students.

That proposal is not part of Gov. Gray Davis' budget plan that the Legislature is currently considering.

The money could be added to the budget in May, when the state has a better idea of revenues after tax returns are filed. However, the state's power crisis could make it difficult for lawmakers to increase any spending.

Students and school officials who attended the news conference with Lockyer and Eastin agreed that schools need more counselors.

DH 20010263

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