

Recommendation **Two**

Improving Middle & High School College & Career Counseling

Brenda Bautsch, NCSL
Patricia Martin, The College Board

**The
College
Completion
Agenda**
State
Policy Guide

Produced in Collaboration with:



NATIONAL CONFERENCE
of STATE LEGISLATURES

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

America is striving to once again be the world leader in the percentage of college-educated citizens. Planning ahead for college is crucial to getting there and succeeding. School counselors in particular can play an essential role in helping students plan for college.

School counselors can have a significant influence on children's aspirations, school course choices and future career options — elements essential to achieving a meaningful career and good quality of life.¹ School counselors support young people as they explore career and college options and can be advocates for educational equity. They can encourage higher education for all students, not just those students traditionally deemed academically talented. As a result, counselors are critical for improving the number of minority, low-income and first-generation students going to college. These students are often the most in need of advice and support.²

Because counselors are so vital, schools should maintain an adequate staff of professionally trained counselors. In addition, counseling should be available early, by at least the middle-school level, so that students can begin to explore their future career options, understand the paths to reaching those careers, and take the necessary courses and tests. Without this early information, students who are interested in careers that require a college degree may arrive at high school without the academic knowledge and skills needed to take rigorous, college-preparatory course work. A statewide focus on school counselors helps guarantee that every student has the chance to consider and plan for his or her career and college goals early.

What Legislators Need to Know

To evaluate the state's school counseling performance, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the counselor-to-student ratio in the state? How does it vary among districts and schools?
- Is there a difference in student academic aspirations and results when there are better counseling programs at the schools?
- How are school counselors being used? Is their time spent on college and career counseling, or are they being used in other roles (i.e., testing, hall and cafeteria duty, substitute teaching)?
- What are the training and licensing requirements to become a school counselor?
- What are the standards for counseling in middle school and in high school?
- Do school counselor training programs include course work on college and career counseling?
- How are counselors evaluated? Are there measurable goals (e.g., to increase participation in AP® classes, or to increase the number of students who apply for college) for which counselors are held accountable?

Research

Counseling is a profession.

Qualified school counselors should be designated, trained professionals charged with the responsibility for:³

- Championing educational equity and academic success for all students;
- Nurturing students' aspirations and developing academic plans to enable students to fulfill their hopes and dreams;
- Creating safety nets that ensure students reach their goals; and
- Distributing information and guidance to empower students and their parents or guardians to understand the widest range of educational postsecondary options available after high school.

Professional school counselors need to have the knowledge and skills to work in collaboration with the school and community to meet these responsibilities.

School counselors foster a college-going culture.

The Consortium of Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago concluded that improving college enrollment and success requires two efforts: (1) fostering a college-going culture; and (2) providing students with adequate support and guidance. CCSR found that school counselors are in a unique position to accomplish both efforts.⁴ Schools, however, do not always use counselors in a manner that allows them to spend time on college and career guidance.

Counseling in schools today takes on many identities and is mostly driven by the principal and community. Research tells us that in communities where people believe their children will be prepared to go to college after high school, school counselors spend more than half their time on college tasks. In poor communities where there are large numbers of minority youth, school counselors spend significant time on personal and social issues, including mental health services. In these schools, little time is spent on college activities, academic planning and transitions from high school to college.⁵

In addition, schools often assign several duties to counselors, which decreases the time they have available to foster a college-going culture. An inordinate amount of school counselors' time is spent on activities such as test administration, record keeping, hall and cafeteria duty, substitute teaching, making attendance calls, and changing class schedules. The amount of time spent on these activities varies from school to school and district to district. School counselors at private schools, for example, spend an average of 58 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling, while

those in public schools spend an average of only 25 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling.⁶

School counselor training often falls short.

Research indicates that the majority of school counselor graduate training programs do not include course work in college readiness counseling. Very few programs train school counselors in how to actively prepare middle and high school students, parents, and families for college.⁷

Student-to-counselor ratios are high.

Student-to-counselor ratios average 315:1 in public high schools and 241:1 in private high schools,⁸ with states having a range of more than 1,100 students per school counselor to 165 per school counselor.⁹ Professional norms for counselor staffing recommend one counselor for every 250 students.¹⁰ At low-income rural and urban schools, counselors are assigned an average of 1,056 students.¹¹

Counselors have a wide influence.

Research shows the effectiveness of counselors.

- School counselors are very effective in helping middle school children in career development.¹²
- A 2000 poll of students found that a majority turned to their counselors for college-preparation advice and found college counseling sessions helpful.¹³
- School counselors influence students' future plans for going to college by having high expectations for the students. A survey of 10th- and 12th-graders found that students perceived that their counselor expected them to attend college regardless of their ethnicity. As a result, the students' expectations for themselves increased.¹⁴
- A study of Florida K–12 students in 2001–2002 looked at the effect of increased and improved counseling services on student achievement and behavior.¹⁵ Counselors focused on improving school success skills, such as listening, goal setting and self-motivation. The counselors provided structured group counseling and classroom guidance. Seventy percent of the students involved in the study improved their academic achievement and behaviors that lead to success in school.



KY

State Policy Approaches



Low Cost

Incorporate courses on college and career counseling into master's degree programs for school counselors.

Urge practicing school counselors who did not complete this kind of course work in their master's training to take a college and career counseling certification course.

Consider authoring a resolution that promotes counselors as key members of school staff.

In the resolution, legislators also can encourage collaboration among high school counselors, postsecondary institutions and the state department of higher education.

Provide encouragement and incentives for schools to create college-going cultures.

Schools will need to implement or bolster activities that help all students explore and plan for college and careers, take college-preparation courses, apply to colleges, and learn how to apply for financial aid. Schools should also widely distribute results attributed to effective school counseling, professional development, and successful college and career advising programs.



Medium Cost

Incorporate a college and career counseling program into high school graduation requirements.

In 2002, **Kentucky's** General Assembly created the Individual Learning Plan and made it a requirement for high school graduation. The learning plan is an electronic-based comprehensive college and career counseling program aimed at helping students connect their high school classes and activities with their post-high-school goals. The plan, administered by school staff, begins in sixth grade and runs through 12th grade. The plan uses each student's academic interests, skills and hobbies to suggest possible careers. The program then creates a four-year high school plan based on the student's college and career goals. It is reviewed regularly by school counselors or teachers throughout high school to track progress and any shifts in aspirations. The program promotes the idea that early planning gives students the opportunity to fully prepare for college and careers.¹⁶



Medium Cost

New Mexico lawmakers passed a similar measure, SB 561, in 2007. To graduate, all students must complete a Next Step Plan at the end of grades eight through 11 that sets a course schedule and academic and career goals. The purpose of the plan is to help students think about and plan for their future. Since it is done yearly, the plan is meant to be flexible and adjusted each year to meet students' changing goals and needs. The Next Step Plan is filled out with the help of parents, teachers and school counselors. As part of the process, every student must be informed about course options, including honors, advanced placement, dual credit, distance learning and remedial courses. Every student also must be informed about alternative post-high-school options.

Fund comprehensive counseling programs.

In **Washington**, Navigation 101 is a middle and high school counseling program funded by the Legislature. Select schools administer the program, which matches each student to an adviser — a teacher, counselor, the principal or social worker. Advisers work closely with students from grade six through grade 12 on college and career planning. Having an assigned adviser ensures that each student has at least one adult at the school who knows him or her and cares about the student's future. The advisers follow a curriculum that was developed using academic and counseling standards. It covers topics such as setting personal and academic goals, improving class grades, planning for college, exploring careers, joining extracurricular activities and managing money. Early data show that students who participate in the program are more likely to take Advanced Placement® courses, graduate from high school and enroll in college.



High Cost

Provide professional development funding for school counselors to help them learn the best ways to close the achievement gaps for college preparation and enrollment for all students. Professional training can help school counseling programs promote collaboration among teachers, principals and school counselors on issues of teaching and learning.

Provide state funding to hire culturally competent school counselors in struggling schools with high numbers of low-income and minority students and in schools where academic improvement is needed.

Consider adopting policies governing student-to-counselor ratios that move toward professional norms for staffing middle and high school counseling offices.



Provide funding to enable schools to increase the number of counselors.

In **Colorado**, House Bill 1370 (2008) created the School Counselor Corps Grant that provides \$5 million in grants to increase the number of counselors in middle and high schools. Grants are also meant to increase the quality of counseling and the quantity of services provided. The goal of the grant program is to increase the percentage of Colorado students who are ready to enroll in and graduate from college. In the first year grants were available, schools saw lower student-to-counselor ratios, more professional development for counselors and increased services for students (e.g., college and career preparation and financial aid and scholarship workshops). In addition, through the grant program, schools have increased the amount of college-related data they collect.

Establish measurable goals and monitor the results of increasing counseling staff with state funding.

Merely increasing the number of counselors does not ensure they will be used for college and career counseling. Establishing standards and measurable metrics can hold districts and schools accountable for how counselors are used and can hold counselors accountable for results in student achievement.

If a school goal is to increase the college-going rate, counseling goals and metrics could be established around the steps it takes to get students ready for college. For example, measurable goals could be set to:

- Increase the number of eighth-grade students who take Algebra I by 15 percent over the number who took it the previous year.
- Increase the number of 10th-grade students who take the PSAT/NMSQT® by 20 percent.
- Get 95 percent of the senior class to complete the FAFSA (financial aid form) by Feb. 1.
- Increase the number of high school seniors who are academically eligible to enroll in the state's four-year postsecondary institutions.

Take Action

1 Determine counselor-to-student ratios in the state and how they vary by district. Districts with high numbers of low-income, minority and first-generation students may need more counselor resources.



Short-Term

2 Evaluate standards for college and career counseling in middle and high schools. How do they compare to other states? How could they be improved? What involvement would the legislature have?



Short-Term

3 Convene a group of stakeholders — higher education leaders, nonprofits, local school board members, etc. — and devise a strategy to improve college and career counseling.



Mid-Term

4 Explore federal and nonprofit grants that are available to states to improve college and career counseling.



Mid-Term

5 Evaluate middle school counseling programs and determine where resources need to be increased to ensure all middle school students have access to college- and career-preparation services.



Long-Term

References

College Board. (2007). *The CollegeKeys Compact™. Getting ready, getting in and getting through college: Expanding options for low-income students*. Washington, DC: The College Board. <http://www.professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/final-report.pdf>.

National Association for College Admission Counseling. (2009). Policy recommendations. Arlington, VA: NACAC. <http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/Recommendations/Pages/default.aspx>.

National Association for College Admission Counseling. (2010). *DRAFT legislative language: Graduate coursework in school counseling*. Arlington, VA: NACAC. <http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/MemberAction/Documents/GraduateCourseworkProposal.pdf>.

Notes

1. R. House and P. J. Martin, "Advocating for Better Futures for All Students: A New Vision for School Counselors," *Education* 119 (1999): 284–291.

2. Patricia M. McDonough, *The School-to-College Transition: Challenges and Prospects* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2004); http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2004_IPtransitions.pdf.

3. American School Counselor Association, *The Role of the Professional School Counselor* (Alexandria, VA: ASCA, 2009); <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?pl=325&sl=133&contentid=240>.

4. Melissa Roderick, et al., *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to Success* (Chicago: Consortium of Chicago School Research, University of Chicago, 2008).

5. Patricia M. McDonough, Counseling and College Counseling in America's High School (Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2005); Laura W. Perna, et al., "The Role of College Counseling in Shaping College Opportunity: Variations Across High Schools," *Review of Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 131–159; Richard Lapan and Karen Harrington, *Paving the Road to College: How School Counselors Help Students Succeed* (Amherst, MA: Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, School of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2008).

6. Melissa E. Clinedinst and David A. Hawkins, *State of College Admission* (Arlington, VA: NACAC, 2005).

7. National Association for College Admission Counseling, *Policy Brief: Graduate Coursework in School Counseling* (Arlington, VA: NACAC, 2010); <http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/MemberAction/Documents/GraduateCourseworkBrief.pdf>.

8. U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data, National Institute for Educational Statistics — Public Elementary and Secondary School Student Enrollment and Staff from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2007–2008.

9. National Association for College Admission Counseling, "Public School Student-to-Counselor Ratios, by State: 2006–2007" (Arlington, VA: NACAC, 2009); <http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/Recommendations/Documents/Student%20Counselor%20Ratios%20by%20State.pdf>.

10. See recommendations of the American School Counselor Association at www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=460.

11. Jennifer Ramsey, *IHEP Issue Brief: Creating a High School Culture of College-Going: The Case of Washington State Achievers* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2008).

12. Susan C. Whiston, Thomas L. Sexton and David L. Lasoff, "Career-intervention outcome: A replication and extension of Oliver and Spokane," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 45 (1998): 150–165.

13. Art and Science Group, Inc., *Student Poll 4*, no. 2 (2000): 1–10; http://www.artsci.com/studentpoll/archivedissues/4_2.pdf.

14. W. C. Mau, R. Hitchcock and C. Calvert, "High school students' career plans: The influence of others' expectations," *Professional School Counseling* 2, no. 2 (1998): 161–166.

15. Greg Brigman, *Evaluating the Impact of School Counseling on Student Achievement and Behavior: Florida Research Summary* (Boca Raton, FL: Department of Counselor Education, Florida Atlantic University); <http://www.coe.fau.edu/counsel/FCATrch.pdf>.

16. Achieve Inc., *Aligning High School Graduation Requirements with the Real World: A Road Map for States* (Washington, DC: Achieve Inc., 2007).

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of U.S. states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues, and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The conference operates from offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

For further information, visit www.ncsl.org.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board is composed of more than 5,700 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college readiness, college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid and enrollment. Among its widely recognized programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®), SpringBoard® and ACCUPLACER®. The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, we work to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. We make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

This report can be downloaded at completionagenda.collegeboard.org.
Hard copies may be ordered by contacting cbadvocacy@collegeboard.org.

advocacy.collegeboard.org