



Disability & Mental Health Summit Legislative Panel
Mental Health
Thursday, May 11, 2023 | 10 a.m.
Hosted by
State Representative Dan Miller

***PANEL ONE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMISSION
FOR ADULT MENTAL HEALTH***

- Representative Mike Schlossberg
- Dr. Noreen Fredrick, UPMC Western Behavioral Health
- Christine Michaels, NAMI Keystone PA
- Dr. Lucas Malishchak, PA Department of Corrections
- Chief Jason Haberman, Mt. Lebanon Police Department

PANEL TWO: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS IN SCHOOLS

- Emilia Peiffer, Pennsylvania School Counselors Association; Pennsylvania School Employees Association
- Emily Born, Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health
- Shannon Fagan, Allegheny Intermediate Unit
- Dr. William Stropkaj, Keystone Oaks School District

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PANEL ONE: BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMISSION FOR ADULT MENTAL HEALTH

Representative Mike Schlossberg is committed to a strong and vibrant Pennsylvania serving the best interests of people, not special interests. He knows what we all know: Pennsylvania works best when workers are paid a fair wage, have good health care, live in a safe and affordable home, and can save some money for education and a secure retirement. Representative Schlossberg is a champion for world-class education, regardless of zip code, for all our children through early childhood learning, neighborhood schools and career, technical and higher education. For the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, he was elected Majority Caucus Chair by his colleagues and continues to serve as a co-chair for the House Mental Health Caucus. In prior sessions, Representative Schlossberg was the Democratic Caucus Administrator and Chair of the Northeast Regional Delegation.

Since taking office, Representative Schlossberg has proven to be an effective legislator, serving the needs of Parkland and Allentown and fighting for the values important to Pennsylvanians. In prior sessions, Representative Schlossberg's proposals to increase mental health services for first responders and Rape Survivor Child Custody and Support legislation were also approved by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf. He was also instrumental in the transportation funding legislation approved during the 2013-2014 Legislative Session and signed by Governor Tom Corbett, helping to secure significant investments for the Lehigh Valley's roads, bridges and mass transit.

In 2014, with the death by suicide of Robin Williams in the news, Representative Schlossberg shared his own struggles with depression and anxiety in an op-ed in the Morning Call. His story set forth a very public conversation about mental health and stigma which has become a central focus for Representative Schlossberg. As a result, he co-founded the House Mental Health Caucus in 2015, served as a keynote speaker at various conferences, advanced legislation in the General Assembly, and has traveled to Washington, D.C. to help Congresswoman Susan Wild's efforts to enact federal legislation to improve mental health care access across the country. Representative Schlossberg was also appointed to the Mental Health & Justice Advisory Committee for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and was named co-chair of the Suicide Prevention Task Force by Governor Wolf. Recently, Schlossberg accepted an invitation to join the National Task Force on Workforce Mental Health Policy at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

To address Pennsylvania's mental health care crisis, Representative Schlossberg laid out his agenda, "HOPE for PA," in 2022. This plan would invest \$100 million in public safety by creating safe and healthy communities, improve care by addressing provider and capacity shortages and help more people through training, education, and outreach. Shortly after, Governor Wolf signed the 2022-2023 budget approving an additional \$100 million in federal funding to improve mental health care in Pennsylvania.

Representative Schlossberg was then appointed to the Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health, which was tasked with creating a strategy to allocate those funds.

Noreen Fredrick, DNP, RN serves as Vice President of Ambulatory and Community Behavioral Health Services, UPMC Western Behavioral Health and member of PA Behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health established by Act 54 of 2022.

Over the last four decades, Dr. Fredrick's [work](#) underscores the need to integrate evidenced-based treatment and interventions across a variety of service settings and for appropriate investment along the care continuum to [improve access to care and retention and recruitment of mental health professionals](#). Understanding that recovery is not just relief of symptoms, Dr. Fredrick believes it's about finding connection, sanctuary, and combining evidenced-based treatments with housing, job training and opportunities for social interaction. Moreover, she is responsible for driving clinical excellence and patient outcome across the network, evaluating new treatments and their effectiveness, and for advocating for new care models that advance quality of life for those with mental health conditions.

Dr. Fredrick began her career in behavioral health as a staff nurse at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital and worked at the bedside for several years before accepting her first leadership position as an assistant nursing clinical manager. Over a period of 13 years, she was promoted to various inpatient nursing leadership positions in areas such as Adult/Geriatrics and Schizophrenia before becoming the Program Administrator for UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital's Comprehensive Care Services. In 2001, Noreen transitioned to Mon Yough Community Services as the Director of Clinical Services, eventually serving as the Executive Director of Mon Yough for 11 years before being named Senior Executive Director for UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital's Community Behavioral Health Network in 2015. In July 2018, Noreen was named Vice President of Ambulatory and Community Behavioral Health Services.

Dr. Fredrick is also a member of the Conference of Allegheny Providers, a member-driven organization comprised of 38 mental health, mental retardation and drug and alcohol service provider organizations across Allegheny County.

Christine Michaels, MSHSA, is Chief Executive Officer of NAMI Keystone PA, the state organization in Pennsylvania for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization. Ms. Michaels has more than 35 years of experience in community mental health service delivery, social service agency administration, public policy, and legislative advocacy.

She is an accomplished instructor with experience in curriculum development and is nationally certified by NAMI as a state trainer for NAMI Family-to-Family, NAMI Support Group Facilitators, and NAMI Smarts for Advocacy.

Ms. Michaels is co-chair of the OMHSAS Planning Council Joint Committee and she also serves on the Adult Committee for the OMHSAS Planning Council. She is chair of the Allegheny County MH/ID Advisory Board, serves on the 988 Advocacy Coalition Committee, and acts as the liaison from that committee to the State 988 Advisory Board. Ms. Michaels holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and a Master of Science in Health Services Administration.

Dr. Lucas D. Malishchak is the Director of the Psychology Office within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. In this role, Lucas and his team are responsible for oversight of the mental health care system which supports Pennsylvania's 24 state correctional institutions and more than 39,000 incarcerated individuals. Lucas' doctoral dissertation was titled Alternatives to Segregation and Seriously Mentally Ill Individuals in Pennsylvania State Prisons: A Case Study of Employee Perceptions. In 2016, Lucas accepted a formal invitation to join the teaching faculty of the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), a division of the United States Department of Justice, in Aurora, Colorado, as a subject matter expert in the delivery of mental health care within restrictive housing among state correctional systems. This teaching opportunity was associated with NIC's Managing Restrictive Housing Unit Populations national seminar. In 2015, Lucas was invited by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to address members of the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) regarding the state of correctional mental health services in Pennsylvania and the changes associated with the settlement agreement met with Disability Rights of Pennsylvania.

Jason Haberman is the Chief of Police in Mt Lebanon where he supervises a staff of 112 people and manages a budget of \$11.1 million. Chief Haberman is a liaison to the United States Attorney's Community Police Relations targeting social reform and police engagement issues. He is an executive board member on the FBI Pittsburgh Joint Terrorism Task Force and is trained in Surveillance Detection and Countermeasures from the Department of Homeland Security. In addition to the many promotions and extensive training, Jason has received several awards/commendations including the Federal Bureau of Investigations Golden Triangle Award 2014 and the Port Authority of Allegheny County Police Department Distinguished Service Award 2005.

Mental health is a key priority for Chief Haberman going forward. He is developing a co-response pilot program to address community mental health issues and is actively seeking grant funding that will allow him to implement a follow up/coordination of care program. He also has a strong focus on mental health/wellness issues for police officers and is seeking to provide supports in this area that have not previously been provided.

PANEL TWO: MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS IN SCHOOLS

Emilia Mattucci Peiffer has been a high school counselor at East Allegheny High School for the past 28 years. As a school counselor, she delivers individual, group and crisis counseling to students in need. She presents various classroom lessons, wrote her district's K-12 Guidance Plan, and serves as a member of the SAP team. She achieved RAMP recognition for the school counseling program in 2014 and 2017. And in 2019, she was recognized as PA's School Counselor of the Year. Emilia also currently serves as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, where she oversees operations of this 1000+ member organization. She is responsible for delivering quality professional development to school counselors, maintaining relationships with other educational organizations here in PA and nationally, and working with legislators to ensure that school counselors are meeting the needs of all of their students. Emilia is passionate about the profession of school counseling and works diligently to promote school counselor professional identity. As a result, Pennsylvania's students may be better served by addressing their mental health, academic, and career development needs.

Emily Born is a School Based Liaison Supervisor at the Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health. Emily is passionate about working with multidisciplinary teams to impact change on a systemic level. She has extensive background in social services working with youth and families who have multi-system involvement with various programs. She is passionate about helping families and youth and has experience in the child welfare, mental health and educational fields working to support families to achieve their goals. Emily has supervisory experience providing support and structure for her teams through a trauma informed lens. She enjoys providing an environment for those around her to thrive and improve the culture of their organizations.

Shannon Fagan has worked in both the public and private sectors to support children and families as they navigate confusing —and at times — difficult systems. Her career started in Early Intervention, providing support and services for children and families from birth to age 3. She then spent 10 years in county government as a Child and Adolescent Service System Coordinator, where she supported coordination and collaboration for families and children involved in multiple child-serving systems. As Shannon continued to grow in her work, she was called on to make a bigger impact. In 2008, Shannon became the first director of The Youth and Family Training Institute in Pennsylvania, a program dedicated to create an opportunity for youth and their families to have equal voice in their treatment planning. After eight years of working for the Institute, Shannon was recruited to the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services, where she served as the director of the Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health Services. Shannon used her time in state government to develop systemic, transformative changes designed to disrupt archaic mental health systems.

Shannon then returned to working in early intervention, where she advocated for building and sustaining social emotional learning support, infant mental health and trauma informed care.

She is currently working as the Project Coordinator for Supporting Expansion and Enhancement of K-12 School-Based Social, Emotional Supports (SEEKS SES). This is a unique partnership between the

Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Allegheny County Health Department, funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Expanding Laboratory Capacity COVID-19 grant awards. Over a two-year period, the project will support 10 school districts that have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with a variety of targeted initiatives that are unique to each community. Further, the AIU will partner with higher education institutions in placing social workers, school psychologists and/or counselors to support the project and to bolster a local pipeline of professionals to these fields.

William P. Stropkaj, Ed.D., has been the Superintendent of the Keystone Oaks School District for the past eleven years. Prior to this, he was the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education and Curriculum in the North Allegheny School District for five years. Dr. Stropkaj began his administrative career in the Montour School District where he served for twelve years holding the following positions: Middle School Assistant Principal, Elementary Principal, and Federal Programs Coordinator. As a teacher, Dr. Stropkaj taught Physics and Math in the Deer Lakes School District and the Sto-Rox School District. Dr. Stropkaj is completing 35-years in education.

In addition to his work in K-12 education, Dr. Stropkaj is an adjunct professor at Point Park University, where he has taught courses in the graduate education program and serves on many doctoral dissertation committees and has been an adjunct professor at the Community College of Allegheny County, teaching Physics.

Dr. Stropkaj serves as one of the trustees of the Allegheny County Schools Health Insurance Consortium (ACSHIC), representing 22 school entities. He has also served on the Education Advisory Board at La Roche University and Robert Morris University. In addition, he is a member of The Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents through the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

Dr. Stropkaj earned his Doctoral degree from the University of Pittsburgh in Administrative and Policy Studies and Masters and Bachelors degrees from Duquesne University. He is certified as a Superintendent, an elementary principal, a secondary principal, and a teacher of mathematics and physics. Dr. Stropkaj along with his wife Kimberly and daughter Ava reside in Kennedy Township.

The cover features a background of pink magnolia flowers in the foreground and a blurred image of the Pennsylvania State Capitol building in the background. A dark blue semi-transparent box contains the text.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMISSION

OCTOBER 2022
SPECIAL REPORT

Recommendations to
the Pennsylvania
General Assembly

Commission Scope and Purpose

ACT 54 OF 2022

Act 54 of 2022 established the Behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health. The 24-member Commission was charged with providing recommendations to the General Assembly on the allocation of one-time \$100 million funding to address adult behavioral health needs. As required by Act 54, the Commission voted to visit Centre County and Dauphin County to hear from representatives from rural and urban counties respectively. This report encompasses the recommendations compiled by the Commission.

BACKGROUND

The number of adults with Any Mental Illness (AMI) has been increasing in recent years. Nearly 34 percent of Pennsylvanians have a mental illness or substance use disorder, whereas nationally the prevalence rate for all Americans with a behavioral health diagnosis is 31 percent¹. In 2020 it is estimated that 299,000 of people in Pennsylvania met criteria for a substance use disorder, and in 2021 approximately 5,224 Pennsylvanians fatally overdosed².

The already strained behavioral health workforce has struggled to meet the increasing need for services at every level of care. Solutions to complex systemic issues facing the behavioral health system will require continued partnership, sufficient funding, and renewed commitment to meeting the needs of Pennsylvanians struggling with a mental health diagnosis or substance use disorder.

The Commission is comprised of experts in various fields ranging from the criminal justice system, to treatment professionals, to people with lived experiences. Act 54 of 2022 prescribes ten priority areas that the recommendations should address, detailed on page three.

The Commission explored investment opportunities in the ten areas that were identified by Act 54 throughout the development of this report. Intersectionality between these components indicates that investments in one sector will have impacts in others.

Conceptually, these ten focus areas can be categorized in three overarching categories - workforce, criminal justice, and expanding services and supports - each of which touch upon one or more areas identified below.

Act 54 Focus Areas

- 

Delivery of services via telemedicine
- 

Behavioral health rates, network adequacy, and mental health payment parity
- 

Workforce development and retention
- 


Expansion of certified peer support specialist services and peer-run services
- 

Development and provision of crisis services
- 

Integration of behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment
- 

Cultural competencies when providing behavioral health care
- 

Impact of social determinants of health on behavioral health
- 

Intersection of behavioral health and the criminal justice system
- 

Establishment of an integrated care model that can deliver timely psychiatric care in a primary care setting

Letter from Commission Leadership

Honorable Members of the General Assembly,

The Behavioral Health Commission is pleased to provide the following report to support adults in Pennsylvania with behavioral health diagnoses. Per Act 54, these recommendations on how to allocate \$100 million have been informed by the input of the appointed Commissioners, stakeholders, diverse county representatives, and consumers. We are confident that these recommendations will help urban, suburban, and rural counties alike and are balanced to provide near-term and future benefits to our behavioral health system.

While the \$100 million in federal funds that has been carved out for adult behavioral health initiatives is a step towards improving current systems, the Commission has identified additional priority areas that could benefit from sustained and increased investment in the behavioral health infrastructure in Pennsylvania.


The Commission would like to stress the importance of swift action and ask that the funding authorized as a part of this year's budget be appropriated before the end of this legislative session. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and we look forward to continued partnership as we work collectively to improve the behavioral health landscape in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Michael Humphreys, Co-Chair

Acting Insurance Commissioner



Dr. Dale Adair, Co-Chair

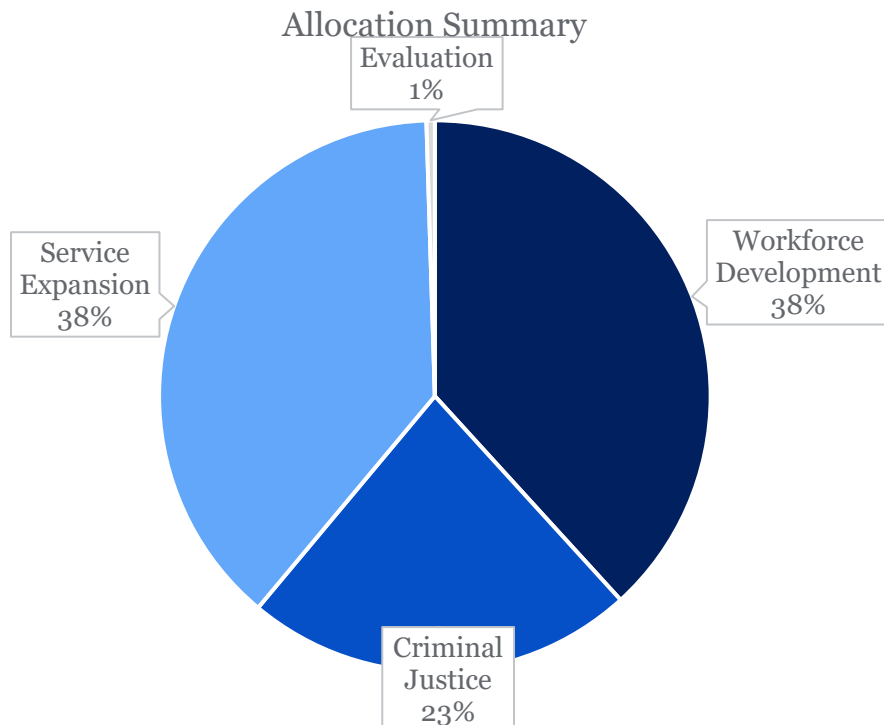
Chief Psychiatric Officer, Department of Human Services

Recommendations

The Commission met four times between August 18, 2022, and September 16, 2022, totaling a commitment of 17 hours of live meeting time. All meetings were advertised per the Sunshine Act, interested parties and members of the public were able to attend meetings of the Commission in-person or virtually. As required by Act 54, the Commission met with county officials in Dauphin County to understand the needs of urban and suburban counties. Additionally, the Commission met with Centre County officials to understand the unique needs of rural counties.

These recommendations are intentionally broad enough to permit counties and local organizations to use these one-time funds in the most impactful way for their communities. Additionally, when funding is awarded, weight should be given to culturally responsive initiatives that further promote equity in historically under-resourced communities.

The Commission would like to recognize the dedicated county officials and behavioral health staff that serve Pennsylvanians every day in the under-resourced behavioral health system. This one-time infusion of funding will cultivate a brighter future for these professionals and the people they serve.



Recommendation #1: Stabilize, Strengthen, and Expand the Workforce

The Commission recommends that **\$37 million** be used to support behavioral health professionals. Challenges recruiting and retaining behavioral health professionals are pervasive and widespread, leading to an underdeveloped and stressed workforce. The Commission heard from counties, community-based organizations, and treatment providers that behavioral health staff have been leaving the field at incredibly high rates and that it is very challenging to fill vacant positions; some organizations reported to the Commission as having vacancy rates in the 30 percent range. In some instances, fast food restaurants and other non-skilled labor positions can offer more competitive wages and better benefits for work that is less emotionally demanding. Pennsylvanians need more professional behavioral health resources. The Commission recommends that funding be targeted toward efforts to retain and recruit healthcare professionals and support professional development within the workforce.

“Without workers our services have no capacity to serve people. Vacancies exist throughout the residential support system and case management and crisis intervention services. Retaining our remaining experienced workers has become a top priority, but difficult to achieve without additional funds.” – Andrea Kepler, LSCW, Dauphin County MH/A/DP Administrator

\$37 Million - Workforce

The following priorities were identified to address the strained workforce:

- Retain existing behavioral health staff and providers through stay bonuses, salary increases, and enhanced benefits
- Incentive programs, such as tuition assistance or reimbursement for students entering high demand behavioral health professions
- Provide opportunities for entry-level staff to develop their skills by attaining higher levels of education and/or credentials

\$32 Million

Dedicated to Pennsylvania's 67 counties to address unique workforce needs in their area

\$ 5 Million

Recommendation #2: Improve Criminal Justice and Public Safety Systems

The Department of Corrections and county jails have unintentionally become the largest providers of behavioral health services in the Commonwealth and are not sufficiently prepared and resourced to meet this population’s needs. The Commission recommends that **\$23.5 million** be used for enhancements to the criminal justice and public safety systems to better serve adults with behavioral health needs. The Commission recommends funding be targeted towards expanding crisis response training and resources, such as expanding pre-arrest diversion programs and investing in corrections-based services including proposals to increase telehealth in corrections-based institutional settings. Facilitating compassionate responses to behavioral health crises could lead to better outcomes for individuals and divert strained correctional resources. Police departments utilizing co-responder models, where a behavioral health professional accompanies police in behavioral health crises, have demonstrated positive outcomes.

“It is an injustice of our system that the neediest members of our community must enter the justice system to access mental healthcare, care that individuals struggle to maintain after they are released from jail.” – Gregory Briggs, Dauphin County Prison Warden

\$23.5 Million – Criminal Justice

Provide comprehensive evidence-based mental health and substance use disorder services and supports to people who are incarcerated and wraparound services for returning citizens to reduce recidivism

\$13.5 Million

Support specialty courts and services for justice-involved individuals

Develop and expand upon pre-arrest diversion programs that connect people with resources in a time of crisis, including individuals with intellectual disabilities and with autism spectrum disorder

\$ 5 Million

For counties to use to develop or expand co-responder models, train first responders in crisis intervention

\$5 Million

Recommendation #3: Expand Capacity for Services and Supports

Given the diverse geographic makeup of Pennsylvania, resources spanning the continuum of care are not readily accessible for Pennsylvanians in every area. Investing in the integration of care, initiation of services, and expansion of delivery mechanisms are all priorities identified by the Commission. The Commission recommends that **\$39 million** be used to broaden the scope of services and supports available to Pennsylvanians. Both Dauphin and Centre Counties indicated needs pertaining to treatment and recovery services. The Commission recommends funding to support innovative models of service delivery, such as 24/7 crisis walk-in centers, collaborative care models to integrate physical and behavioral, and telehealth infrastructure and programs, as well as addressing social determinants of health, and other services along the continuum of care that do not currently exist in various localities. The Commission specifically recommends funding for peer-support services as well as for non-profit organizations providing such services, including necessary training for certified specialists.

“One thing about small counties or rural counties is that everything is shared. So, whatever you decide, if it goes to mental health that is going to be a benefit to Children and Youth, right? Because we intersect on so many levels, we all reap the benefit of what each other gets.” – Julia Sprinkle, Director of Centre County Children and Youth

\$39 Million – Service Delivery

Support and expand the crisis continuum of care to include the establishment of 24/7 walk in centers, mobile crisis services, and suicide prevention

\$15 Million

Facilitate the integration of primary care with mental health and substance use disorder treatment using the collaborative care model

\$10 Million

For counties to address Social Determinants of Health needs including but not limited to supportive housing, older adult behavioral health needs

\$8 Million

Support peer-led services and training to develop peer-support professionals and support statewide consumer-led organizations in providing supports to individuals

\$6 Million

Recommendation #4: Impact Evaluation of Investments

The Commission recommends that **\$500,000** be set aside to evaluate the impact of projects supported by this one-time funding at the end of the funding period. This retroactive study will inform future investments in the behavioral health system. This data will provide valuable insight and quantifiable information that can be used by the legislature for appropriations of future funding, as well as provide accountability for the use of the one-time \$100 million allocation.

Recommendation #5: Develop a Commission Dedicated to Ongoing Analysis and Systemic Reform of the Behavioral Health System

Throughout the course of this Commission, it was evident that there are non-monetary solutions that could be utilized to relieve the stretched behavioral health system. While not within the scope of the current Commission, members believe that continued dialogue about regulatory and legislative reforms could result in future actions to improve behavioral health service delivery in Pennsylvania. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the legislature continue this Commission, or create a new entity tasked with further examining the behavioral health needs of the Commonwealth and recommending enhancements to the behavioral health system to the legislature and relevant state agencies for consideration, funding, and action.

Recommendation #6: Consider Sustained Increases in County Base Funding

The behavioral health system in Pennsylvania, and nationwide, is in crisis and in need of consistent financial support at adequate levels. In 2012, base funding for counties was cut by 10 percent; it has not been increased since then. The need for behavioral health services has steeply risen since the 2020 start of the COVID pandemic and, while utilization is higher, the funding sustaining the services has remained stagnant, forcing counties to do more with less. Flexibility in use of these funds is critical, as each county has unique strengths and challenges, especially across the urban, suburban, and rural spectrum. Additional sustained funding could prevent further erosion of the behavioral health landscape in Pennsylvania. The Commission strongly urges the legislature to bring county base funding in line with the cost associated with providing these critical behavioral health services.

Acknowledgements

The Wolf Administration would like to thank the following Commission members for sharing their time and expertise in developing recommendations:

Co-Chair – Acting Commissioner Michael Humphreys, Insurance Department

Co-Chair – Dr. Dale Adair, Chief Psychiatric Officer, Department of Human Services

Representative Michael Schlossberg, 132nd House District

Representative Wendi Thomas, 178th House District

Senator Maria Collett, 12th Senate District

Ellen DiDominico, Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs

Muneeza Iqbal, Department of Health

Dr. Kathy Quick, Mental Health Planning Council

Lisa Kennedy, Mental Health Planning Council

Reverend Michelle Anne Simmons, Why Not Prosper

Tina Clymer, Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators

Dr. Matthew Hurford, Community Care Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization

Dr. Faith Dyson-Washington, Community Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization

Dr. Maria Oquendo, University of Pennsylvania

Chief Edward Cunningham, Elizabethtown Police Department

Dr. Stephanie Diez-Morel, National Association of Social Workers Pennsylvania Chapter

Dr. Hasshan Batts, Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley

Dr. Kenneth Thomson, Pennsylvania Psychiatric Leadership Council

Dale Klatzker, Gaudenzia

Jillian London, Hamilton Health Center

Dr. Noreen Fredrick, UPMC

Dr. Jeanne Slattery, Pennsylvania Psychological Association

Jason Rilogio, Pennsylvania Peer Support Coalition

Hon. William F. Ward, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

Dauphin County Board of Commissioners, Government Officials, and Local Organizations

Centre County Board of Commissioners, Government Officials, and Local Organizations

SOURCES

¹ [Demographics and Health Insurance Coverage of Nonelderly Adults With Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders in 2020 | KFF](#)

² [Pennsylvania Opioids | PA Open Data Portal](#)

ATTACHED WRITTEN TESTIMONY FROM STATUTORIALY REQUIRED COUNTY MEETINGS

Dauphin County

- Kristen Varner, Administrator, Dauphin County Drug and Alcohol
- Scott Suhring, CEO, Capital Area Behavioral Health Collaborative
- Ted Dallas, President/COO, Merakey
- Erika Saunders, MD, Chair of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health, Penn State
- Mike Alexander, Co-Chair, Dauphin County Community Support Program
- Andrea Kepler, LCSW
- Gregory Briggs, Warden, Dauphin County Prison
- Charles J. Hooker III, Keystone Human Services
- Noreen Fredrick, DNP, RN, UPMC Western Behavioral Health
- Kimberly Feeman, Acting CEO PPI
- Darrell R. Reider, Swatara Township Public Safety Director
- Pamela Rollings-Mazza MD, BMedSc., BN, RN. CCHP. Board Certified Psychiatrist
Chief Medical Officer, PrimeCare Medical, Inc.

Centre County

- Natalie Corman, Deputy Administrator, Centre County Government
- Felicia Stehley, Regional Director of Community Care Behavioral Health
- Cathy Arbogast, Assistant Administrator for Drug and Alcohol
- Tyler Jolley – Chief, Patton Township Police Department
- Val Barner, President/CEO, Skills of Central PA
- Erin Crown, Co-Owner, Oasis LifeCare, LLC
- Beth Gillan, Executive Director, Center for Community Resources
- Captain Kevin Creighton, Pennsylvania State Police
- Lucas Malishchak, Director of the Psychology Office, Department of Corrections

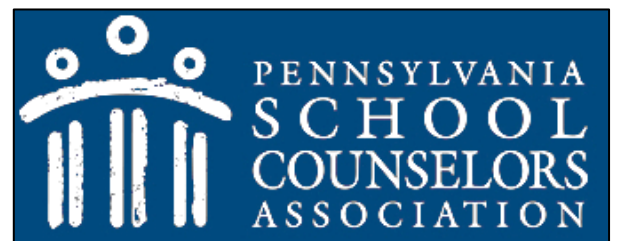
The Commission utilized a resource email account to collect and distribute comments to Commission members. This email address was shared during the public meetings and posted on the Behavioral Health Commission's [website](#), overall 21 comments were received. Submitted comments shared suggestions on improving behavioral healthcare across the Commonwealth and ideas on how to allocate the \$100 million.

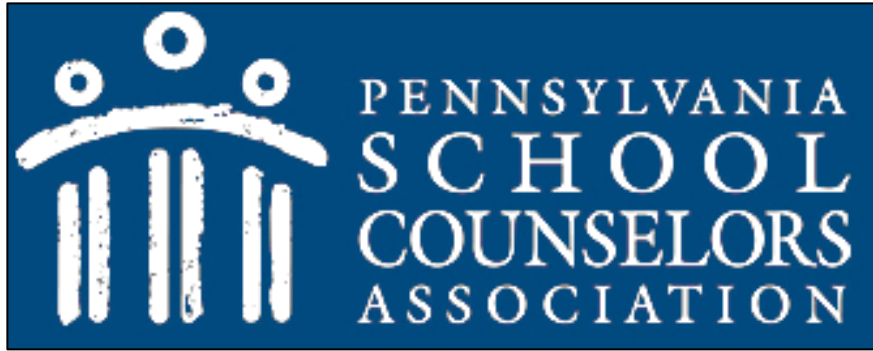
Pennsylvania School Counselor Staffing Report

Volume III

SY 2021-2022

A REVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA'S
STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS





The mission of the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association is to expand the image and influence of professional school counselors, to promote professional and ethical practice, and to advocate for equity and access for all students.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

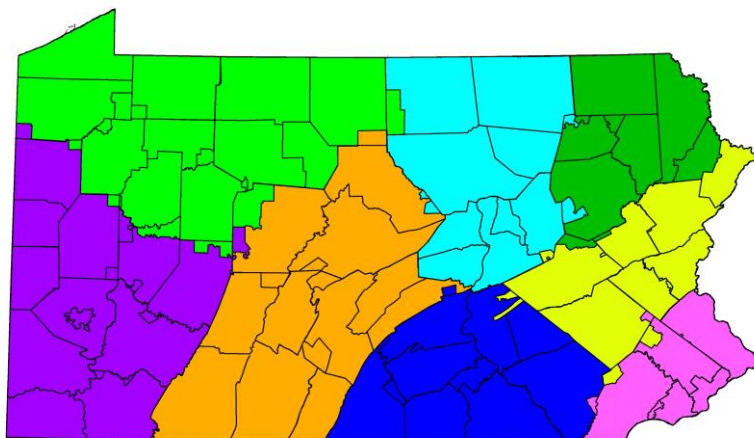
Emilia Peiffer

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Jennifer Kirk, *Chair of the Board*

Larissa Valonis, *Assistant Chair of the Board*

Alicia Oglesby, *Secretary*



Special thanks is given to Adam Oldham and the PSCA Government Relations committee for their work in developing this report.

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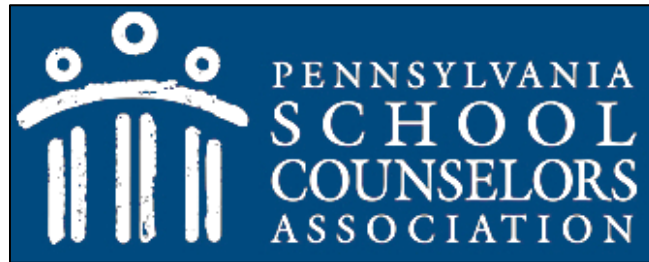
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What is This Report For?

This report is designed **to educate and empower school counselors** across Pennsylvania as they advocate for the investment in school counseling positions and programs in our K-12 education system.

This report is designed **to inform and spark interest with our legislative partners and elected officials** who set education policy, establish appropriations and funding, and who have the capacity to instill the value of school counselors and school counseling programs into law.

This report will serve as an **annual reference point** for the numbers and ratios of school counselors employed in Pennsylvania.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE AT A CRISIS POINT

The challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. **And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.**

-Dr. Vivek H. Murthy

Surgeon General of the United States

Protecting Youth Mental Health, The US Surgeon General's Advisory (2021)

The vast majority of K-12 students have suffered significant learning losses of half a year or greater. **Substantial numbers of students have continued falling further behind normal levels of learning for their age and grade.** Students with disabilities have suffered disproportionate academic impact.

-Center for Reinventing Public Education

The State of the American Student: A Guide to Pandemic Recovery and Reinvention (2022)

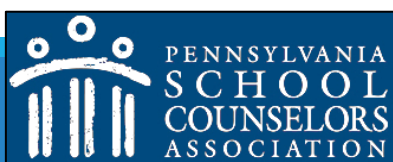
As we saw in the 10 years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, **mental health among students overall continues to worsen**, with more than 40% of high school students feeling so sad or hopeless that they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks during the previous year—a possible indication of the experience of depressive symptoms. We also saw significant increases in the percentage of youth who seriously considered suicide, made a suicide plan, and attempted suicide.

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2023)

Almost 70% of Pennsylvania students reported moderate or high levels of depression. One in four students report feeling like a failure. **One in five students report seriously considering suicide.**

-Pennsylvania Youth Survey (2021)



Every Task Force meeting included requests from multiple participants to **increase the number of both physical and mental health professionals in schools**. Task Force participants specifically requested additional nurses, social workers, psychologists, **school counselors**, and other support staff in schools to help meet students' needs.

PA School Safety Task Force Report (2018)

PA Office of Auditor General

School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania's vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.

However, **many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant case loads, and are often isolated in their work.**

State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act (2019)

PA Department of Education

Understanding there is an acute need to improve students' mental health, and schools are one of the best places to provide support before mental health problems escalate, the Office of Attorney General has called for **increasing the number of mental health counselors** in schools every year since the Safe2Say Something program launched in 2019.

Special Report on Student Mental Health (2022)

PA Office of Attorney General

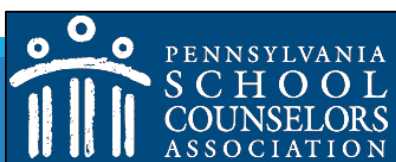
The Court heard extensive credible testimony from educational professionals and experts as to how other professional staff...such as guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, and other support staff...help students succeed. There was evidence that low-income students often require more support, **so an adequate number of counselors is needed to meet those needs.**

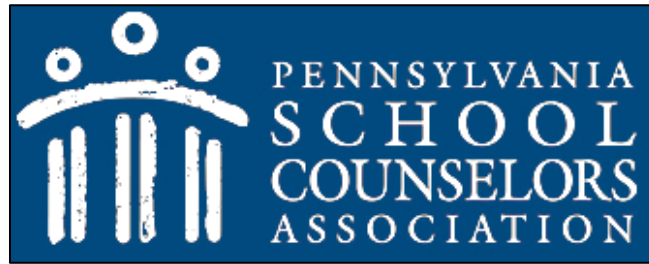
While it is true that there was testimony that several of the districts have some of these personnel, **there was also testimony that it was the bare minimum required by law, of an insufficient quantity to actually meet student needs.**

William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education (2023)

Judge Renee Cohn Jubelirer

PA Commonwealth Court





CALL TO ACTION

School Counselors for All Students

Defined Scope of Practice

Reasonable

Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Level

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Building

Who are School Counselors?

(The Role of the School Counselor, American School Counselor Association)

School counselors are certified educators who improve student success for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.



SCHOOL COUNSELOR QUALIFICATIONS

- ▶ Hold, at minimum, a master's degree in school counseling
- ▶ Meet the state certification/licensure standards
- ▶ Fulfill continuing education requirements
- ▶ Uphold ASCA ethical and professional standards



Also employed in district supervisory positions; and school counselor education positions

Direct Services with Students

Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:

- Instruction
- Appraisal and Advisement
- Counseling



LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

School counselors work to maximize student success, promoting access and equity for all students. As vital members of the school leadership team, school counselors create a school culture of success for all.

- ▶ **School counselors help all students:**
 - apply academic achievement strategies
 - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
 - plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force)
- ▶ **Appropriate duties include providing:**
 - individual student academic planning and goal setting
 - school counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards
 - short-term counseling to students
 - referrals for long-term support
 - collaboration with families/teachers/ administrators/ community for student success
 - advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings
 - data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges
 - acting as a systems change agent to improve equity and access, achievement and opportunities for all students

Indirect Services for Students

Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others including:

- Consultation
- Collaboration
- Referrals

SCHOOL COUNSELING IN PENNSYLVANIA

CERTIFIED EDUCATORS

**EDUCATIONAL
SPECIALIST**
(22 Pa. Code 49.1)

**ELEMENTARY AND
SECONDARY SCHOOL
COUNSELOR**
(CSPG #76)

EXISTING PLAN FRAMEWORK

**K-12 STUDENT
SERVICES PLAN**
(22 Pa. Code 12)

K-12 GUIDANCE PLAN
(22 Pa. Code 339)

As described in the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines, school counselors are responsible for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program, and collaborate with others to meet student needs in three areas – academic development, career development, and personal-social development.

According to the PA Code, school counseling is considered a developmental “student service” that, along with other student services, should support students throughout their enrollment in school K-12. No definitions exist for school counselors or school counseling programs in the PA Code.

Vocational guidance is to be delivered to all students according to the PA Code, but the PA Code does not specify who is responsible for delivering this comprehensive, sequential program of guidance services.

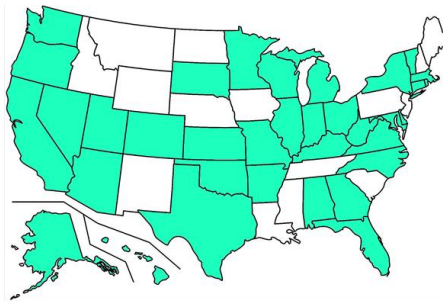
The existing framework in Pennsylvania is too broad and vague to guarantee students are receiving school counseling services.

School Counselors in American Schools

School counseling services in schools are commonplace across the United States.

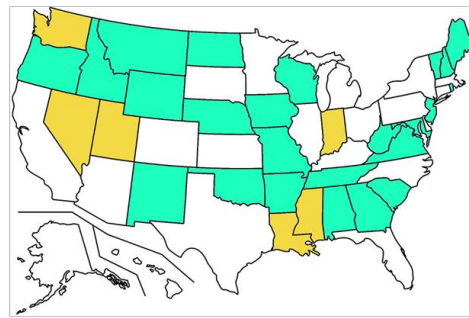
The two primary ways states incorporate school counseling services into schools are (1) requiring districts to develop comprehensive school counseling programs and (2) mandating school counselor positions in school buildings.

Pennsylvania is the **ONLY** state that does not require comprehensive school counseling programs or mandated school counseling positions in schools.



35 states

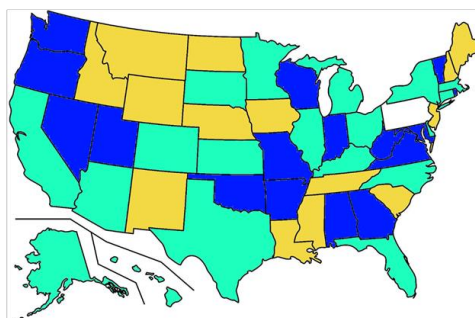
Comprehensive school counseling programs required in public school districts



30 states

■ K-8 AND 9-12 School Counselors Mandated
 ■ 9-12 School Counselors Mandated

School counselors required in public school districts



49 states

■ State Comprehensive School Counseling Plan/Framework
 ■ Partial/Full K-12 School Counselor Mandate
 ■ Both

Why Student to School Counselor Ratios Matter



IDEAL CASELOAD

250 students per school counselor



The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 250:1

Research demonstrates that lower student-to-school-counselor ratios are associated with higher student achievement measures, better graduation rates, and lower disciplinary incidents (Lapan et al., 2012; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018; Parzych et al., 2019)

Nationally, school counselor ratios are significantly higher, with the most recent comparison estimating a national average ratio of 408:1 (ASCA, 2022)

ASCA reports that Pennsylvania's ratio for the 2021-2022 school year was 343:1 (ASCA, 2022)

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

LEA Type / Description	# of School Counselors*		
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
School District	4225	4235	4323
Charter School	339	347	394
Intermediate Unit	153	151	151
Career and Technical Center	108	104	108
State Juvenile Correction Institution	4	4	4
Total	4829	4841	4980

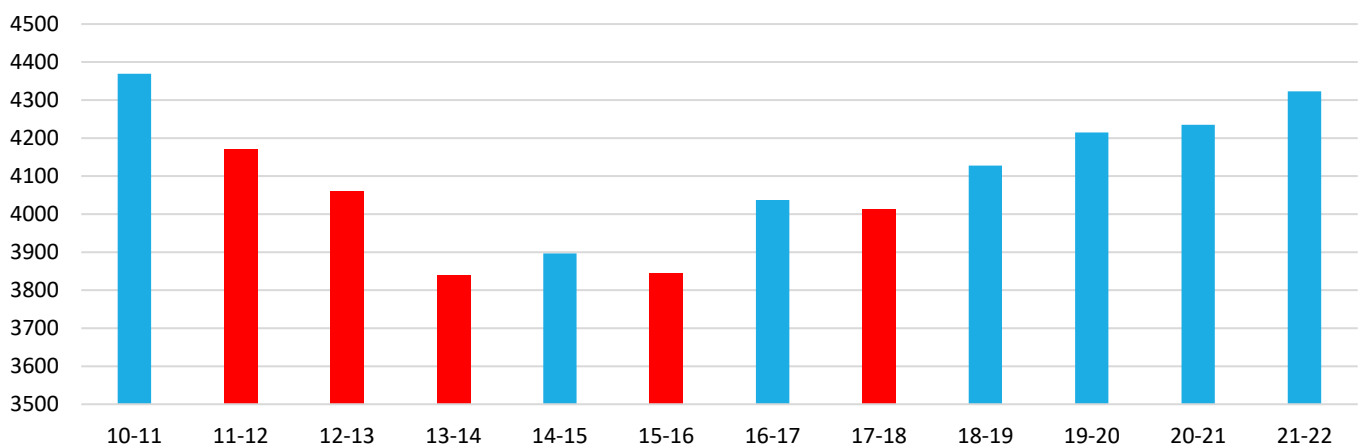
Each year, the PA Department of Education releases the Professional Personnel ID Report listing out every public educator, and each assignment they had during the previous school year. Because each educator can have multiple assignments, the number of school counselors was determined by tabulating the listed Full-Time Equivalency (FTE) together for each individual educator.

In the majority of cases, each school counselor had a total assignment value of 1, though each individual school counselor may have been assigned to multiple buildings within an LEA. There were 95 school counselors that had less than 1 full position listed, and therefore it may appear, for example, that there are more school counselors practicing in public school districts than are actually in physical buildings.

*The numbers appearing throughout this report are focused on school counselor staffing in the 499 public “School Districts” throughout the Commonwealth.

Historic Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

Annual # of School Counselors in PA Public School Districts



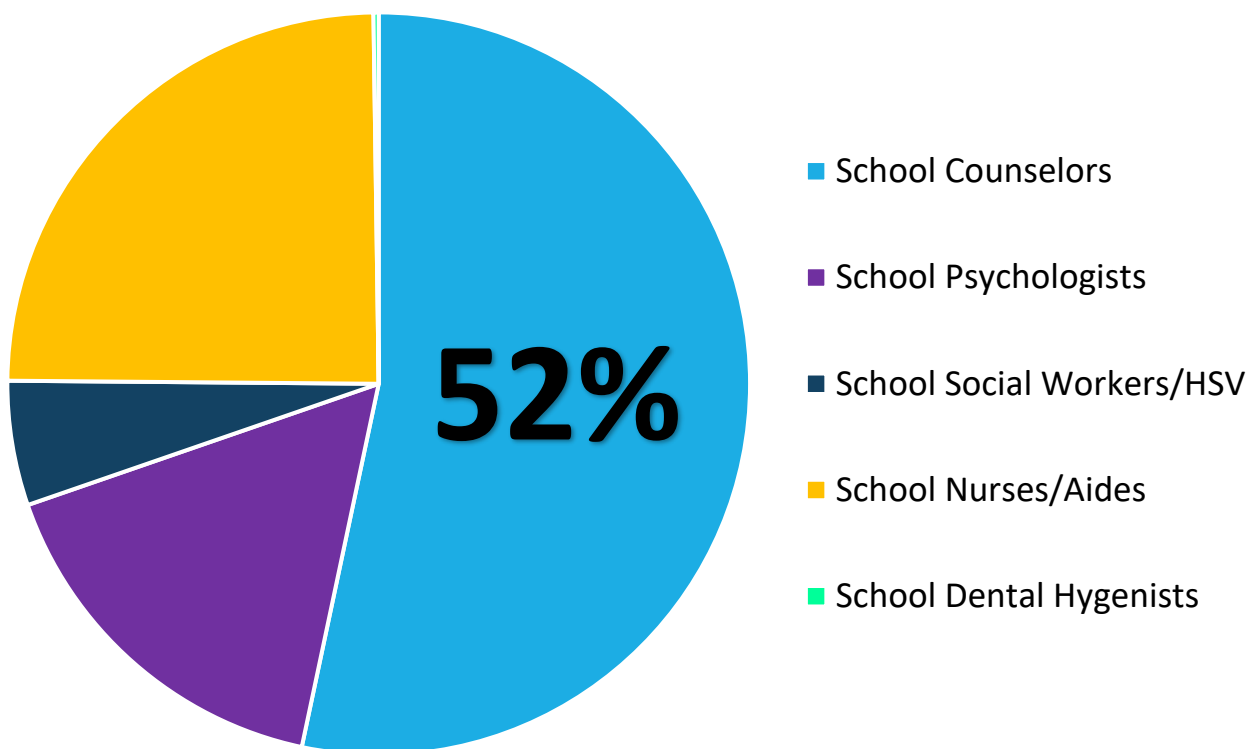
11 Year School Counselor Staffing Review	# of School Counselors*		
	Elementary	Secondary	Total
SY 2010-2011	1,660	2,709	4,369
SY 2021-2022	1,793	2,530	4,323
Change in School Counselor Staffing	+133	-179	-46

Since 2010,
there has been a net loss
of 46 school counselors
in Pennsylvania Public School Districts.

*Annual PDE Professional Personnel Individual Staffing Reports (2010-2022)

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

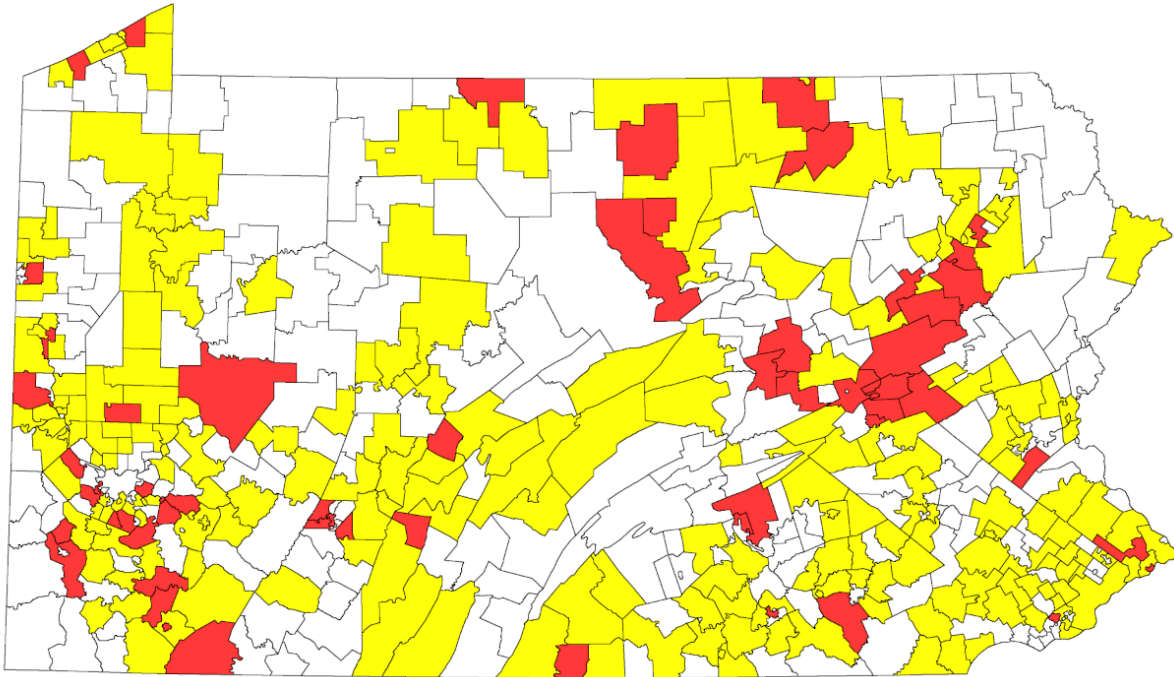
Student/Pupil Services Professionals (SY 21-22)



Totaling 52%,
school counselors are the **largest group**
of all Student/Pupil Services professionals
across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Statewide Snapshot



1:353

Median Student to School Counselor Ratio
in PA Public School District Buildings

50% of PA Public School Districts
have average building ratios of **1:350 or higher**

1 in 10 PA Public School Districts
have average building ratios of **1:500 or higher**

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Building

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings
No School Counselor Listed	192
550 or Higher	334
450 to 550	340
350 to 450	593
250 to 350	758
250 or Less	461
Total	2,677

Less than 20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings meet the nationally recommended 250 students to 1 school counselor ratio.

20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings have ratios of 550 students to 1 school counselor, or have no school counselor at all.

Elementary school buildings (various grade configurations including K-6) are most likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios than any other building type.

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Grade Configuration

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings by Grade Configuration						
	Total	K-6	K-8	6-8	9-12	5-12	K-12
No School Counselor Listed	192	135	14	15	15	6	6
550 or Higher	334	262	30	28	12	1	1
450 to 550	340	269	17	26	21	7	0
350 to 450	593	375	32	105	49	32	0
250 to 350	758	288	34	180	187	67	2
250 or Less	461	136	26	99	152	46	2
Total	2,677	1,465	153	453	436	159	11

Less than 20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings meet the nationally recommended 250 students to 1 school counselor ratio.

20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings have ratios of 550 students to 1 school counselor, or have no school counselor at all.

Elementary school buildings (various grade configurations including K-6) are most likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios than any other building type.

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Grade Configuration

Building Level Configuration	# of Buildings	Average Ratio	Median Ratio	No SC Listed
Elementary (K-6)	1,464	1 : 444	1 : 412	135
Middle (6-8)	453	1 : 337	1 : 312	15
High (9-12)	436	1 : 297	1 : 271	15
Total	2,353	-	-	165

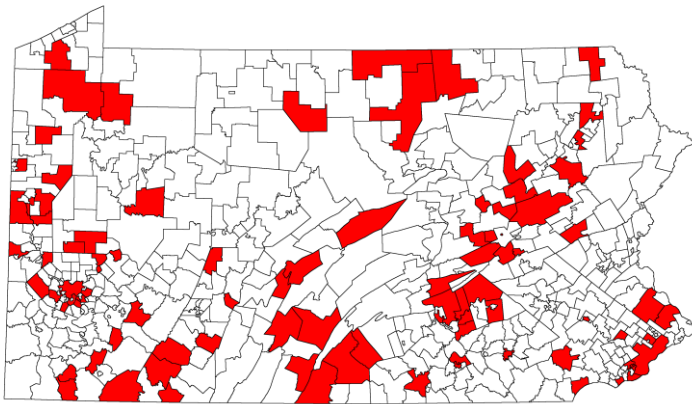
88% of Pennsylvania’s school buildings are configured by standard grade level (Elementary, Middle, High). Note that elementary school buildings may be primary schools (K-2), intermediate schools (3-5), elementary schools (K-5 or K-6), or another variation of the K-6 grade band.

Building Level Configuration	# of Buildings	Average Ratio	Median Ratio	No SC Listed
ELE + MS (K-8)	153	1 : 479	1 : 362	14
MS + HS (5-12, 6-12, 7-12)	160	1 : 299	1 : 288	6
ELE + MS + HS (K-12)*	11	-	-	11
Total	324	-	-	31

12% of Pennsylvania’s school buildings are configured with multiple levels within one building (for example, Junior/Senior High Schools, “Elementary” and “Secondary”). School counselors working in these buildings may then be responsible for students ranging from 5 years old up to 18 years old, which increases demand on their ability to address all levels of student development efficiently.

*Most of these K-12 “buildings” are special programs within school districts, such as cyber academies

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity



Districts with Buildings
with No School Counselors Assigned

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings	
	Total	Title I
No School Counselor Listed	192	76%
550 or Higher	334	74%
450 to 550	340	68%
350 to 450	593	60%
250 to 350	758	45%
250 or Less	461	46%

School buildings serving communities with higher levels of need have fewer school counselors available for those students.

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity

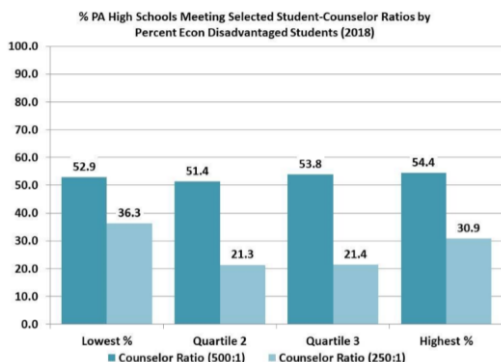
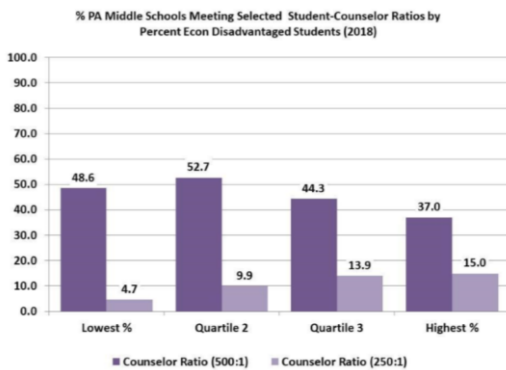
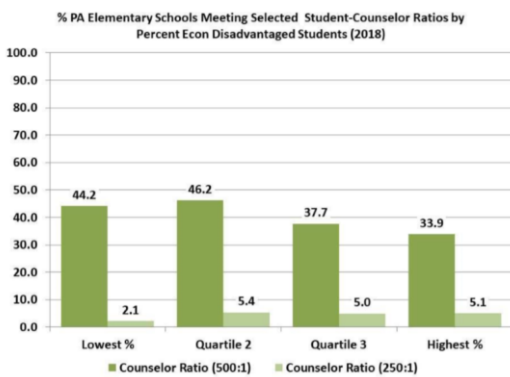
Total Public-School Buildings	No School Counselors Assigned	At Least a Fraction of a School Counselor Assigned	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	192	2,485	2,677
% Title I	76%	56%	57%
Average % of Student Enrollment (not White)	45%	32%	33%
Average % of Student Enrollment Economically Disadvantaged	56%	45%	46%

In comparison to schools with even a fraction of a school counselor assigned...

...school buildings without any school counselors assigned are:

- more likely to be a Title I school
- serve students from minority backgrounds
- serve students who come from economically disadvantaged homes

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity



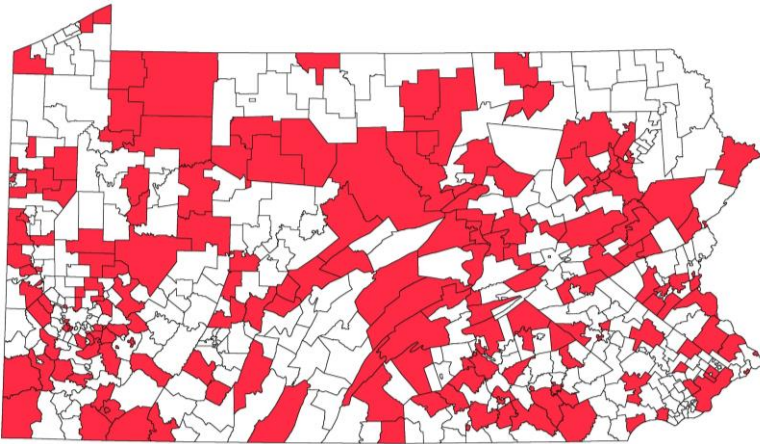
Research from Dr. Edward Fuller, Associate Professor and the Director for the Penn State Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis (PCEEPA) shows that schools serving student populations with higher levels of poverty are likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios.

Total Public-School Buildings	Title I Schools	Non-Title I Schools	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	1,537	1,140	2,677
Average Ratio	1 : 422	1 : 356	1 : 393
Median Ratio	1 : 386	1 : 313	1 : 353
Average % of Student Enrollment Non-White	42%	21%	33%
Average % of Student Enrollment English Language Learner	5.6%	1.9%	4.1%

School counselors in Title I school buildings have significantly higher caseloads than school counselors in non-Title I school buildings, and these caseloads involve a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds.

Our most vulnerable students are the most likely students to not have access to school counselors.

School Counselors and Split Building Assignments



45%

225 school districts (45%) have buildings served by school counselors who are assigned to multiple buildings, impacting over a **quarter of a million students**, mostly **elementary school children**.

In practice, this means a school counselor might be assigned to two elementary schools, and only be physically present in each two or three days a week. This puts increased demand on the school counselor to be able to establish relationships not only with multiple groups of students, but multiple sets of staff, administration, parents, and communities.

In some cases, a school counselor may be called from one building to go to another in the event of a crisis, or a crisis may be handled by another school employee who may not have the same qualifications and training as a school counselor. The analogy of a fire sprinkler system demonstrates the risk in this – you want the sprinklers to be available and working every day, not just on days when there is a fire!

School Counselor Positions Needed for 250:1 Recommended Ratio

	19-20	20-21	21-22
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	6,229	6,028	6,029
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings	4,195	4,207	4,296
Total School Counselors Needed	2,034	1,821	1,732

Pennsylvania students
only have 70% of the school counselor positions needed
 to meet staffing recommendations.

56%

of public school buildings need at least 0.5+ additional SC positions to achieve ASCA recommended ratio.

The majority of these buildings are elementary schools, which serve our youngest students.

Building Need Categories	# of Additional SC Needed
Buildings Needing at Least 0.5 – 0.99 Additional SC	759
Buildings Needing at Least 1.0-1.99 Additional SC	607
Buildings Needing at Least 2.0-2.99 Additional SC	110
Buildings Needing at Least 3.0+ Additional SC	26
Total Buildings	1,502

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

\$130 MILLION

Number of School Buildings	2,677
Number of Students	1,507,186
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	6,029
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings (SY 20-21)	4,296
Total School Counselors Needed	1,732
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 20-21)	\$74,950

It would take approximately **\$130 million** to hire the total school counseling positions needed in PA, which is **less than 1% of the total state appropriations for education** for the 21-22 school year.

This investment would impact each district differently based on their specific staffing needs and salary schedules as determined by local CBAs.

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

\$300

Number of School Buildings (SD LEA)	2,677
Number of Students (SD LEA)	1,507,186
Total School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	6,029
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 21-22)	\$74,950
Total Annual Investment of Ideal School Counselor Staffing	\$452 million
Total Investment Per Student	\$300

If Pennsylvania committed to funding the complete school counselor staffing needs for an ideal student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1, **it would be a \$300 investment per child per year.**

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

\$86 MORE

	CURRENT	IDEAL
Number of School Buildings (SD LEA)	2,677	2,677
Number of Students (SD LEA)	1,507,186	1,507,186
Total School Counselors	4,296	6,029
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 21-22)	\$74,950	\$74,950
Total Annual Investment School Counselor Staffing	\$322 million	\$452 million
Total Investment Per Student	\$214	\$300

If Pennsylvania committed to funding the complete school counselor staffing needs for an ideal student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1, **it would require \$86 more per child per year.**

Defined Use of School Counselor Time



The ASCA National Model, which outlines best practices for school counselors and school counseling programs, recommends that **80% of a school counselor's time be spent in direct services to students.**

While school counselors are willing team players in the overall functioning of a school system, these non-school counseling duties interrupt and detract from the professional service that they provide to students and families.

Pennsylvania does **not** currently have a defined scope of practice for school counselors. Unlike classroom teachers, who are hired to perform defined classroom duties, school counselors are often used as utility players in a school building – covering classes when teachers are absent and no subs are available, coordinating standardized testing, filling in on duty rotations, or serving as data and records clerks. They sometimes function as pseudo-administrators, tracking student attendance and administering discipline.

Providing a scope of practice would **help school counselors advocate for appropriate roles and responsibilities in their buildings** so that students and families get the services school counselors are uniquely qualified to provide.

Defined Use of School Counselor Time

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

The PA School Safety Task Force (2018) identified several key areas that require a multidisciplinary approach to prevention, intervention, and response – social isolation and bullying, comprehensive social and emotional education throughout a student’s K-12 education, and insufficient staffing levels for both physical and mental health services.

School counselors are trained to **address student social and emotional development, as well as mental health assessment and response.**



Top 5 PA Safe2Say Something Report Types (2019)
Bullying/Cyber Bullying
Cutting/Self-Harm
Suicide/Suicidal Ideation
Depression/Anxiety
Drug Use

Safe2Say Something is an anonymous reporting service for students to report unsafe or concerning activities in schools, implemented in 2019 by the PA Attorney General’s Office.

Students have primarily used this service to report concerns about their mental health.



STUDENT CAREER READINESS

“School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania’s vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.

However, **many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant case loads, and are often isolated in their work.**”

-Pennsylvania State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2019 (p.96)

School counselors are also a primary vehicle for **college and career advisement and planning.**

As these domains of student learning are now a part of the Future Ready PA Index, which is a public dashboard of school quality and performance, the need for school counselors to be able to focus their work has never been greater.

The School Counseling Services Act of 2021

HB 1825

Over the two years, Pennsylvania students have faced perhaps the greatest disruption ever to impact our school systems and communities. COVID-19 not only closed our school buildings in the spring of 2020, but continues to loom as an ever-present force in students' lives. It impacted how they received instruction, how and when they were able to see their friends, the employment of their families and neighbors, and the safety and stability of what school is supposed to be as they grow and develop, and they prepare to return to school again with ongoing uncertainty about how the school year will operate.

While many of our students have demonstrated resilience and perseverance through these unprecedented challenges, many others are struggling to cope with the increased strain on their mental, social, and emotional health.

- Throughout the pandemic, mental health problems have accounted for a growing proportion of children's visits to hospital emergency rooms throughout the pandemic (CDC, 2020)
- Mental and behavioral health concerns have been and continue to be the top referral categories through Pennsylvania's anonymous student reporting app Safe2Say Something (PA Department of the Attorney General, 2019; 2020)
- The rates of teenage suicide have been on the rise for the past decade (CDC, 2020), and in the last administration of the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), depressive symptoms were reported by students as one of the main risk factors they face, along with low attachment to their communities, and a low commitment to their schools – all factors that have steadily increased across all grade levels since 2015 (PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2019).

Across the United States, school counseling services are generally guaranteed to students through one of two state practices – requiring school districts to outline comprehensive school counseling programs, or requiring a certain number of student to school counselor ratio in school buildings. Some states do both of these things.

Pennsylvania is the only state in America that does neither of these things.

The School Counseling Services Act of 2021

HB 1825

As the only state yet to act on school counseling services for our students, there is no better or more timely reform than guaranteeing all Pennsylvania students have access to clearly defined, comprehensive school counseling programs.

School counselors in Pennsylvania are often confronted with the reality that their role is not well understood by school leaders and the general population. They must not only provide services to students, but must simultaneously educate and advocate in their schools and communities about their roles and areas of expertise. This means that not all school counselors are able to work effectively and efficiently with their students, and the types of services provided can look vastly different from one school district to another all across Pennsylvania.

While school counselors have provided responsive services for students in crisis for many years, the need for proactive, preventative, and educational programming specific to mental health and social-emotional learning has been magnified by the disruptions brought to our schools by COVID-19.

The School Counseling Services Act will provide clarity for students and families as to the services they can expect to receive from their school counselors, to school districts who are seeking to support their students effectively through a global pandemic, and to taxpayers who can see their money fund efficient student support services that align with best practices, no matter their zip code or socioeconomic status.



School counselors dedicate their time to service delivery for students, which is defined and understood by students, parents, and other staff.



Every district has a written, comprehensive school counseling program, delivered by certified school counselors.

**Introduced in the
PA House of Representatives
September 8, 2021
by
Representative
Dan Miller (D-42; Allegheny)
with 13 Cosponsors**

The School Counseling Services Act of 2021

HB 1825 Introduction Memo

“Increasing Student Success with More School Counselor Support”

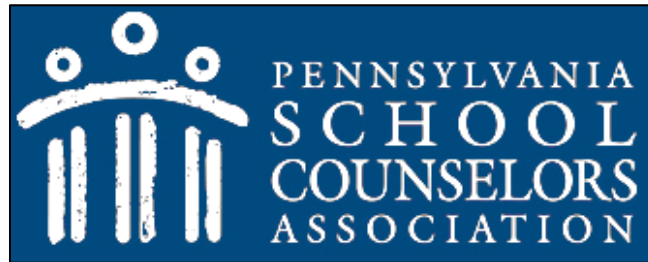
“Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that does not require standardized school guidance counseling services in all schools. To make matters worse, as students were forced to pivot during COVID-19, their access to academic planning and career preparation opportunities suffered – all of which were exacerbated by pandemic-related anxiety and depression.

My legislation would create the School Counseling Services Act and require that schools develop a robust and comprehensive school counseling plan with the goals of improving the transition process following graduation, enhanced access to quality mental health supports, and strengthening relationships between guidance counselors and students.

Guidance counselors fill a tremendous role in students’ lives, often wearing multiple “hats” as they work to ensure students have the tools and resources to succeed beyond graduation, whether they pursue further education or the workforce. This effort would allow schools, parents, and the community to measure a school’s effectiveness in providing a holistic educational experience that seeks to meet the highly individualized needs of all students.

Please consider your support of this legislation to align Pennsylvania with the rest of the country to create nurturing and supportive learning environments for Pennsylvania’s next group of leaders.”

-Representative Dan Miller (D-42; Allegheny)



CALL TO ACTION SUMMARY

Define the Scope of Practice (80% Direct, 20% Indirect)

- School Counseling Services Act (HB 1825)
- School counselors often serve as test administrators, serve in duty roles, and perform “utility player” roles as needed in their buildings, as opposed to delivering school counseling services and content through a guaranteed and viable program
- Student social, emotional, and mental health are a priority and school counselors are uniquely trained to address these domains

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

- 1 in 10 school districts have ratios of 1:500 or higher
- 50% of PA school districts have average ratios of 1:350 or higher
- For \$300 per student each year, which is only \$86 more than is currently being spent, every student in PA could have access to a school counselor

A Certified School Counselor for Every Level

- Of the 192 school buildings with no school counselor, ~80% of these are elementary schools, and 76% are Title I schools

A Certified School Counselor for Every Building

- 45% of PA school districts have buildings served by school counselors who are assigned to multiple buildings
- Over a quarter million students have a school counselor who is assigned to multiple buildings
- In most cases, these are elementary school children
- Title 1 school buildings and buildings serving minority populations are less likely to have a school counselor and if they do, the ratios are higher

Methodology Used to Determine PA SC Ratios

PDE PA Professional Personnel ID Report (2021-2022)

- Filtered by Elementary and Secondary School Counselor assignment description
- Filtered by Public School District
- # of School Counselors Assigned Per Building calculated by adding the full-time equivalency (FTE) of each school counselor assigned to each building ($[FTE * 0.01] * 1$)

Future Ready PA Data Files (2021-2022)

- Building Enrollment
- “Ideal” staffing calculated by dividing each building’s enrollment by 250, in line with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended ratio
- District and Building demographic information
- Title I designation

Needed Difference calculated by subtracting each building’s summed FTE # of School Counselors Assigned from the “Ideal” staffing

References

American School Counselor Association (2019). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs*, fourth edition. Alexandria, VA: Author.

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Dr. Edward J. Fuller, Associate Professor of Education at Penn State University, Director of the Penn State Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis (PCEEPA), and Associate Director of Policy for the University Council for Educational Administration

For questions about the data laid out in this report,
please contact Adam Oldham at aoldham@paschoolcounselor.org

EXISTING PENNSYLVANIA FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

Pennsylvania is the ONLY state that does not have either a state plan for comprehensive school counseling services or mandated school counseling positions in schools. Despite this, there are existing systems that broadly define school counseling professionals and some of the services they provide to students and schools. In the absence of explicit definition and scope of practice, the way Pennsylvania schools utilize certified school counselors can look quite different from one place to another, even within the same school district.

EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST (22 Pa. Code 49.1)

CERTIFICATION

Professional certified personnel whose primary responsibility is to render professional service other than classroom teaching, such as dental hygienist, home and school visitor, instructional technology specialist, social restoration specialist, nutrition service specialist, **elementary counselor, secondary counselor**, school nurse and school psychologist.

<p>A. The educational specialist understands the central concepts, structures and delivery styles of the professional area in which the educational specialist practices and can foster learning experiences for all students.</p> <p>B. The educational specialist understands how all children learn and develop, and can contribute to the provision of learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, career and personal development.</p> <p>C. The educational specialist understands how students differ in their ability and approaches to learning and creates opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.</p> <p>D. The educational specialist understands and uses a variety of professional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.</p> <p>E. The educational specialist uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning and self-motivation.</p>	<p>F. The educational specialist uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques supported by appropriate technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in and out of the classroom.</p> <p>G. The educational specialist plans professional services based upon knowledge of professional field, students, the community and curriculum goals.</p> <p>H. The educational specialist understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.</p> <p>I. The educational specialist thinks systematically about practice, learns from experience, seeks the advice of others, draws upon educational research and scholarship and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.</p> <p>J. The educational specialist contributes to school effectiveness by collaborating with other educators and parents, by using community resources, and by working as an advocate for change to improve opportunities for student learning.</p>
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CERTIFICATION AND STAFFING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

CERTIFICATION

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR (PK-12) (CSPG 76)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in accordance with 22 Pa. Code § 49.13(b)(10), developed the Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines (CSPG) to provide guidance involving compliance with state laws governing certification and staffing practices in school entities within the Commonwealth. The CSPGs also provide clarification to educators regarding (1) the issuance of professional certificates, (2) the grade level and content scope of certificate subject areas and (3) the appropriate certificate for staffing professional positions in public schools. In the CSPGs, you will find valuable information related to certificate eligibility as well as the proper staffing practices that will help achieve educational excellence in the schools of the Commonwealth.

<p>An educator holding a valid Pennsylvania certificate for Elementary and Secondary School Counselor is responsible for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program.</p> <p>The certified School Counselor collaborates with others to meet student needs in three areas:</p>	ACADEMIC	CAREER-PLANNING	PERSONAL-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interprets cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests Participates in special education individualized education programs (IEP's) Assists in the educational placement (transition) of departing students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with career program planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation Coordinates student work-release programs in which students meet specific academic and work experience requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts classroom guidance activities Provides individual and group counseling related to academic or personal social development including peer mediation and bullying Provides intervention and prevention

Each school entity shall prepare a **written plan for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated K-12 program of the student services** based on the needs of its students. Though the variety of student services offered will differ from school to school depending upon its size and the needs of its students, the following categories of services shall be provided by each school entity in planning its student services:

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES	STUDENT SERVICES MUST:
Address student developmental needs throughout their enrollment in school. Developmental services include guidance counseling , psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services that support students in addressing their academic, behavioral, health, personal and social development issues.	
DIAGNOSTIC, INTERVENTION, AND REFERRAL SERVICES	
Address students who are experiencing problems attaining educational achievement appropriate to their learning potential. Student services staff use diagnostic services to identify barriers that limit a student's success in school. Intervention services actively engage student services staff in activities planned to reduce or eliminate specific barriers to student success. Student services staff may arrange for referrals to other school-based or school-linked professionals or may refer parents and guardians to appropriate community-based services for assistance.	
CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION SERVICES	STUDENT SERVICES MUST:
Consultation services are used by student services staff, in partnership with parents or guardians, to obtain assistance to address barriers and issues that are outside the scope of the student services professional. Consultation and coordination services may be used to assist in the diagnosis, intervention or referral of students who face barriers to success. Coordination services connect school resources with other available resources to assist students in meeting their educational objectives.	
	STUDENT SERVICES MUST:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an integral part of the instructional program at all levels of the school system. • Provide information to students and parents or guardians about educational opportunities of the school's instructional program and how to access these opportunities. • Provide career information and assessments so that students and parents or guardians might become aware of the world of work and of a variety of career options available to individual students. • Provide basic health services outlined in Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P.S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) for students and information to parents or guardians about the health needs of their children. • Persons delivering student services shall be specifically licensed or certified as required by statute or regulation. • The Department of Education will provide guidelines and technical assistance to local education agencies in planning student services.

DEFINITIONS (22 Pa. Code 12.16)	<i>Student services</i> —Services designed by a school entity to support the instructional program and to help students attain their educational and career goals.	STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (22 Pa. Code 12.42)
	<p>(i) Services may include school guidance counseling, health services (under Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) and 28 Pa. Code Chapter 23 (relating to school health)), psychological services, social work and home and school visitor services.</p> <p>(ii) School entities may supplement, but may not supplant, these services through school-based, school-linked, or coordinated services provided by locally available social and human services agencies.</p>	The Commonwealth's student assistance program is designed to assist school personnel to identify issues, including alcohol, drugs and others, which pose a barrier to a student's learning and school success. Student assistance is not a treatment program; rather, it is a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning, and, where the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the parent and the student with information so they may access services within the community. The student assistance team members do not diagnose, treat or refer for treatment; but they may refer for an assessment for treatment.

There shall be a written plan on file, approved by the local board of school directors, for the development and implementation of a **comprehensive, sequential program of guidance services** for kindergarten through 12th grade.

The plan must include procedures to provide for guidance services to AVTs.

<p>1. Assistance to students in selecting vocational curricula that meet their needs and address their interests.</p> <p>School entity counseling services must ensure that counselors do not direct or urge any student to enroll in a particular career or program, or measure or predict a student's prospects for success in any career or program based upon the student's race, color, national origin, sex or disabilities. School entities cannot counsel students with disabilities toward more restrictive career objectives than students without disabilities and with similar abilities and interests.</p> <p>2. Assistance for all vocational students in making educational career plans including high school academic and technical preparation and postsecondary education and training, and adjustments through the use of individual and group counseling and appropriate student assessment procedures.</p> <p>3. Provision of occupational and educational information needed for realistic career planning in an organized, systematic fashion for students, parents and teachers.</p>	<p>4. Maintenance of cumulative records and the use, exchange and release of student information in accordance with § § 12.31 and 12.32 (relating to general requirements; and elements of the plan).</p> <p>5. Adequate orientation procedures for vocationally oriented pupils.</p> <p>6. Support of a placement service that is developmental and makes provisions for the transition from school to the world of work.</p> <p>7. Formal and informal consultation with teachers, administrators and other school staff.</p> <p>8. A school-initiated system of parental involvement.</p> <p>9. Liaison activities with community agencies.</p> <p>10. Assistance in the conduct of follow-up studies to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.</p>
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School Counselors for All Students

Pennsylvania is the **only state in America** that does not presently require defined school counseling programs or school counselors in our schools. In the absence of explicit definition and scope of practice, the way Pennsylvania schools utilize certified school counselors can look quite different from one place to another, even within the same school district.

While there are almost 5,000 school counselors currently working in Pennsylvania, too many students, schools, and communities do not have reasonable access to a school counselor. While many schools need more school counselors, there are also schools who are not utilizing existing school counselors appropriately, resulting in less effective and efficient services. Pennsylvania must act to ensure school counselors can deliver the services students need now more than ever.

DEFINE THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

SERVICES

PASS THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE

DEFINED USE OF TIME

MAXIMIZING EXISTING RESOURCES

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM SUPPORT



INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS

STAFFING

REASONABLE STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS

CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY LEVEL

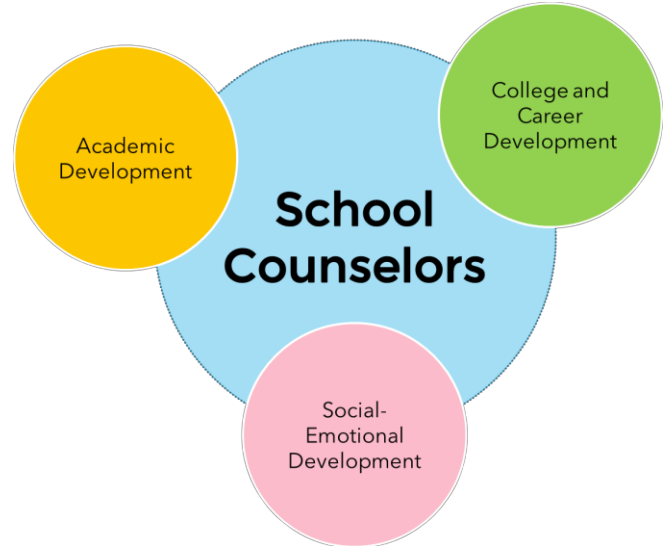
CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY BUILDING

Comparing Student Services Professionals

Schools in Pennsylvania have historically utilized three different types of student services professionals to support student mental health and success. School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers each function in similar and yet distinct roles dealing with student mental health, academic achievement, and human development. The differences are primarily in scope of reach – school counselors service all students, while school psychologists and school social workers service students identified as in need of or potentially in need of higher levels of intervention.

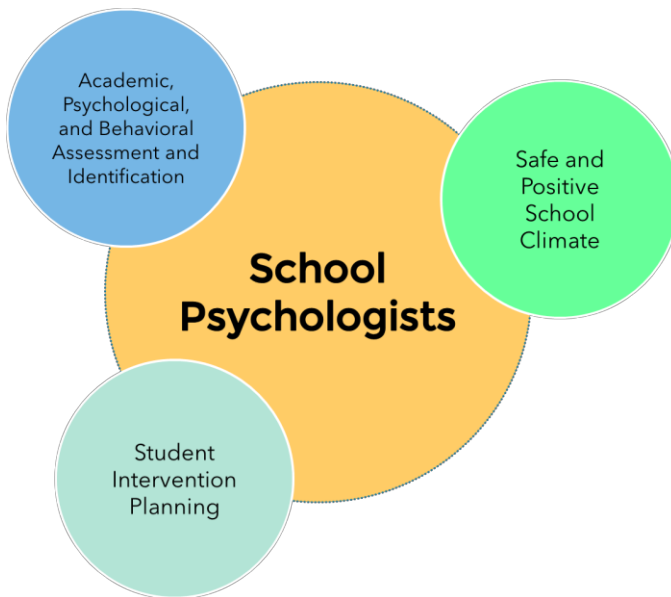
Deliver comprehensive school counseling services that address and support all students' developmental needs and growth.

- Standards-Aligned Classroom Instruction
- Individual Student Planning
- Responsive Services
 - Individual and Group Counseling
 - Crisis Response
- Referral Services



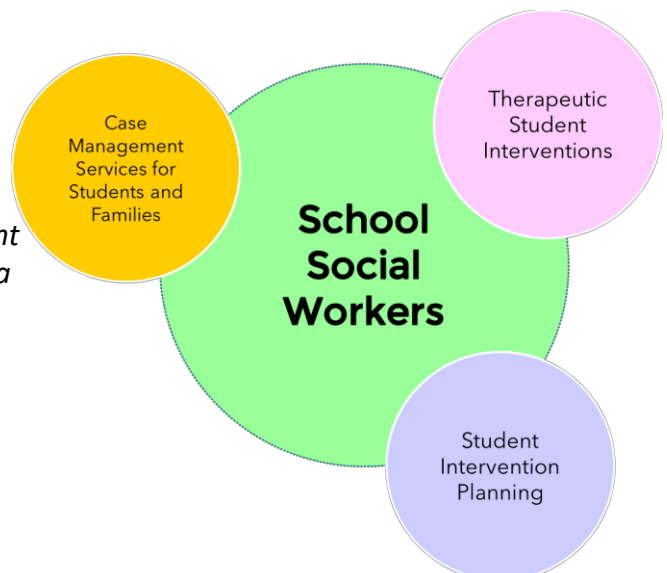
Evaluate and assess student concerns with individual academic achievement and behavioral health.

- Assessments and Identification
- Individualized Education Planning (IEPs)
- Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support



Support students and families in need of basic resources, direct interventions, and case management services, providing a bridge between the school and a student's home/family environment.

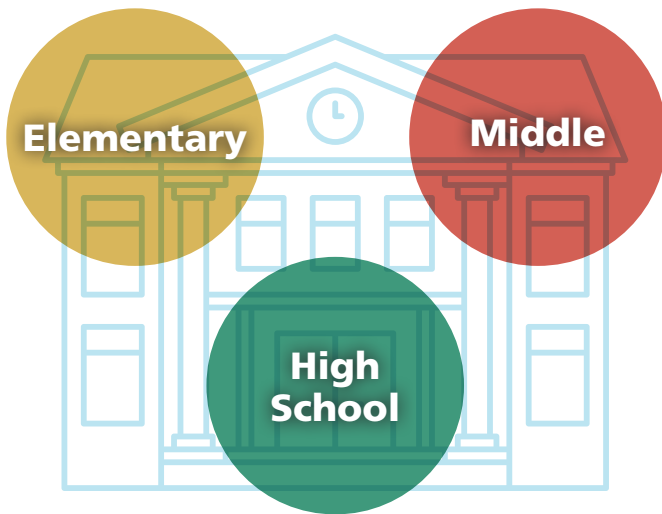
- Case Management
- Coordination of Care
- Direct Therapeutic Services and Interventions for Students Demonstrating High Levels of Need



Who are School Counselors?

School counselors are certified/licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.

EMPLOYED AT ALL LEVELS



Also employed in district supervisory positions; and school counselor education positions



SCHOOL COUNSELOR QUALIFICATIONS

- ▶ **Hold, at minimum, a master's degree in school counseling**
- ▶ **Meet the state certification/licensure standards**
- ▶ **Fulfill continuing education requirements**
- ▶ **Uphold ASCA ethical and professional standards**



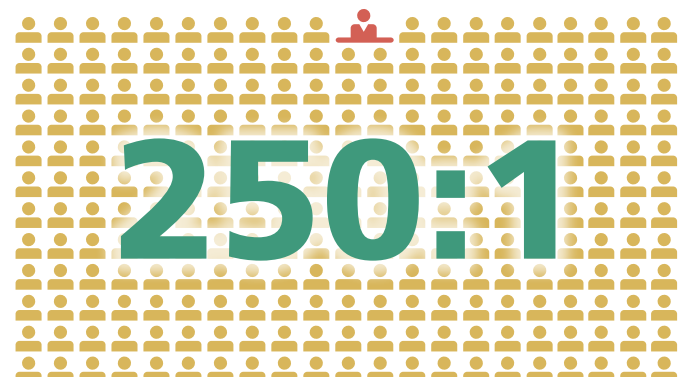
LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

School counselors work to maximize student success, promoting access and equity for all students. As vital members of the school leadership team, school counselors create a school culture of success for all.

- ▶ **School counselors help all students:**
 - apply academic achievement strategies
 - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
 - plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force)
- ▶ **Appropriate duties include providing:**
 - individual student academic planning and goal setting
 - school counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards
 - short-term counseling to students
 - referrals for long-term support
 - collaboration with families/teachers/ administrators/ community for student success
 - advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings
 - data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges
 - acting as a systems change agent to improve equity and access, achievement and opportunities for all students

IDEAL CASELOAD

250 students per school counselor



The School Counselor's Role

School counselors design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes. They lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: define, deliver, manage and assess.

DEFINE

School counselors create school counseling programs based on three sets of standards that define the profession. These standards help school counselors develop, implement and assess their school counseling program to improve student outcomes.

Student Standards –

ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success

Professional Standards –

- ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors
- ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

MANAGE

To be delivered effectively, the school counseling program must be efficiently and effectively managed. School counselors use program focus and planning tools to guide the design and implementation of a school counseling program that gets results.

Program Focus

- Beliefs
- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement

Program Planning

- School Data Summary
- Annual Student Outcome Goals
- Action Plans
 - Classroom and Group
 - Closing the Gap

School counselors work to create a future world where all students thrive.

- Lesson Plans
- Annual Administrative Conference
- Use of Time
- Calendars
 - Annual
 - Weekly
- Advisory Council

DELIVER

School counselors deliver developmentally appropriate activities and services directly to students or indirectly for students as a result of the school counselor's interaction with others.

These activities and services help students develop the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success and improve their achievement, attendance and discipline. Through the school counseling program, school counselors ensure equitable academic, career and social/emotional development opportunities for all students.

Direct Services with Students

- Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:
- Instruction
 - Appraisal and Advisement
 - Counseling

Indirect Services for Students

Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others including:

- Consultation
- Collaboration
- Referrals

ASSESS

To achieve the best results for students, school counselors regularly assess their program to:

- determine its effectiveness in helping all students succeed
- inform improvements to their school counseling program design and delivery
- show how students are different as a result of the school counseling program

School counselors also self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors to inform their professional development and annually participate in a school counselor performance appraisal with a qualified administrator. The ASCA National Model provides the following tools to guide assessment and appraisal.

Program Assessment

- School Counseling Program Assessment
- Annual Results Reports

School Counselor Assessment and Appraisal

- ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies Assessment
- School Counselor Performance Appraisal Template

Emily Born
School Based Liaison Supervisor
Allegheny County Department of Human Services
Office of Behavioral Health
412-841-0536

Dan Miller Event Talking Points – Emily Born – Office of Behavioral Health – School Based Liaison Supervisor

- Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a state mandated program that is required in all secondary schools (Middle and High School buildings).
 - o This program was put in place as a prevention measure to identify barriers to learning students were experiencing due to mental health and drug and alcohol needs.
 - o SAP is often the entry into the mental health and drug and alcohol system for many children and adolescents

 - o Counties are required to support this program by providing a Student Assistance Program liaison to all public school districts. The liaison conducts screenings for students and connects them with mental health services and any other needed supports.

- SAP has been underfunded for years with a lack of increased funding for close to 30 years.
 - o Counties have been providing additional funding for this program; however the program has evolved to meet the needs students and the increased funding provided by counties is still not adequate to cover the increased needs seen.

- SAP Providers have been increasingly asked to take on elementary school buildings by school districts in order to provide necessary intervention and connection to services earlier in the life of a child.
 - o Our county statistics show that 40% of screenings conducted by SAP Providers are done at the elementary level, which they are not being paid to do.
 - Over the past several years, multiple SAP Providers have made the difficult decision to discontinue providing this service due to the lack of funding
 - o Due to this increase in elementary screenings, providers have been unable to provide educational groups to students on things such as grief and loss, trauma experience, and important social skills, which is an important part of the SAP model.

- SAP Providers and School Districts are all reporting an increased amount of screenings and intensity of need with students of all ages.
 - o There are significant gaps, due to staffing issues, in our child and adolescent mental health system and students in need are going longer and longer without services.
 - o SAP liaisons are working to make connections for students; however it is often months until a necessary support is able to be put in place.



Guidance Counselor vs. School Counselor

Historically, the term **“guidance counselor”** was used to refer to counselors working in the schools. **This term has evolved to “school counselor”** as the scope of duties has changed and evolved. Although some schools still used the outdated “guidance counselor” term, the PA School Counselor Association encourages the use of **“school counselor”** to more accurately reflect the role.

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

- Reactive
- Services to some
- Impact measured via feelings and perceptions
- Ancillary role to school improvement process
- Work in isolation



SCHOOL COUNSELOR

- Proactive/data-driven
- Program for all
- Impact measured via achievement, attendance and behavior data
- Essential role in the school improvement process
- School counselors as school leaders
- Develop, manage and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program

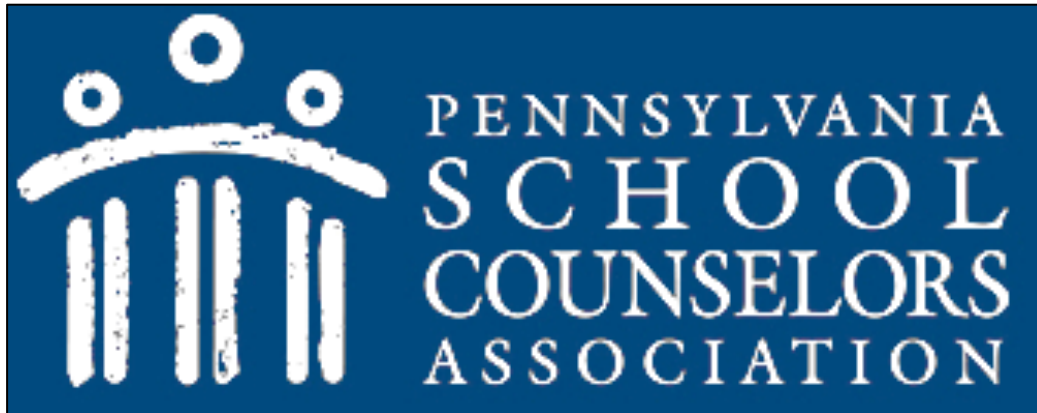


Excerpt from **“School Counseling Principles: Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future: A History of School Counseling,”** by Norman C. Gysbers, Ph.D.

“The terminology issue is still with us today. Is it guidance, counseling, guidance and counseling, or counseling and guidance? The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has come down firmly on the side of the term school counseling program although the literature still reflects the usage of various combinations of terms. The terminology issue also is reflected in personnel titles. Again, ASCA has come down firmly on the title school counselor, although the public still uses the title guidance counselor, and some school districts use the title guidance dean, going back to a title used earlier.

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SCHOOL COUNSELING AS PRIMARY CARE

A ROADMAP TO GUARANTEE
EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES
FOR ALL PENNSYLVANIA STUDENTS

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE AT A CRISIS POINT

The challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. **And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.**

-Dr. Vivek H. Murthy

Surgeon General of the United States

Protecting Youth Mental Health, The US Surgeon General's Advisory (2021)

The vast majority of K-12 students have suffered significant learning losses of half a year or greater. **Substantial numbers of students have continued falling further behind normal levels of learning for their age and grade.** Students with disabilities have suffered disproportionate academic impact.

-Center for Reinventing Public Education

The State of the American Student: A Guide to Pandemic Recovery and Reinvention (2022)

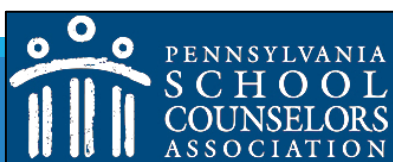
As we saw in the 10 years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, **mental health among students overall continues to worsen**, with more than 40% of high school students feeling so sad or hopeless that they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks during the previous year—a possible indication of the experience of depressive symptoms. We also saw significant increases in the percentage of youth who seriously considered suicide, made a suicide plan, and attempted suicide.

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2023)

Almost 70% of Pennsylvania students reported moderate or high levels of depression. One in four students report feeling like a failure. **One in five students report seriously considering suicide.**

-*Pennsylvania Youth Survey (2021)*



Every Task Force meeting included requests from multiple participants to **increase the number of both physical and mental health professionals in schools**. Task Force participants specifically requested additional nurses, social workers, psychologists, **school counselors**, and other support staff in schools to help meet students' needs.

PA School Safety Task Force Report (2018)

PA Office of Auditor General

School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania's vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.

However, **many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant case loads, and are often isolated in their work.**

State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act (2019)

PA Department of Education

Understanding there is an acute need to improve students' mental health, and schools are one of the best places to provide support before mental health problems escalate, the Office of Attorney General has called for **increasing the number of mental health counselors** in schools every year since the Safe2Say Something program launched in 2019.

Special Report on Student Mental Health (2022)

PA Office of Attorney General

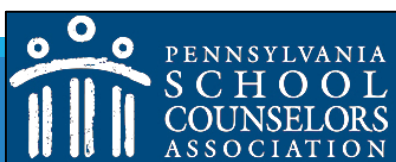
The Court heard extensive credible testimony from educational professionals and experts as to how other professional staff...such as guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, and other support staff...help students succeed. There was evidence that low-income students often require more support, **so an adequate number of counselors is needed to meet those needs.**

While it is true that there was testimony that several of the districts have some of these personnel, **there was also testimony that it was the bare minimum required by law, of an insufficient quantity to actually meet student needs.**

William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education (2023)

Judge Renee Cohn Jubelirer

PA Commonwealth Court



STUDENT SERVICES

HOW PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS RESPOND TO STUDENT NEEDS

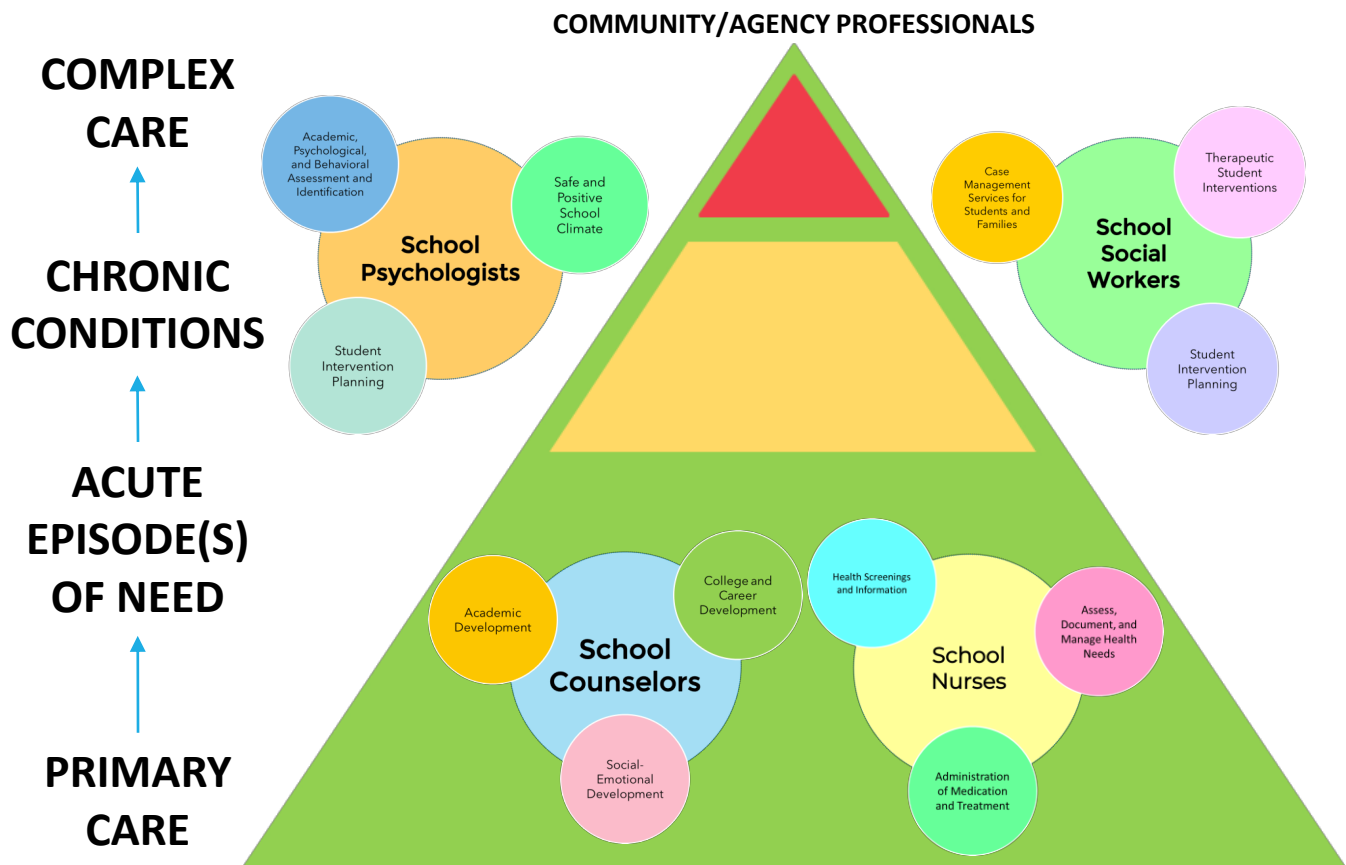
The most efficient way to deliver comprehensive mental health support to students is through school counseling services that operate in line with best practices, and with staffing that supports appropriate student to school counselor ratios.

Both in terms of the existing workforce and scope of practice, school counselors represent the largest group of student services professionals in Pennsylvania, and they work with all students on their caseload, not only students who are identified as needing support or intervention.

School counselors work together with other student services professionals to support the developmental needs of students. School counselors deliver proactive and preventative services to students to address their developmental needs, and they are also available for students when responsive or crisis needs arise (i.e. primary care). School counselors collaborate with/refer students and families to other student services professionals, such as school psychologists or school social workers, when the need for targeted or intensive interventions and programming (i.e. complex care) arise.

Student services professionals also partner with community and agency-based services for students when needs extend beyond what a school is able to provide.

While all student services professionals contribute to the health and wellness of students in our schools, understanding the unique expertise and scope of practice can help schools utilize these professionals as efficiently and effectively as possible.



COMPARING STUDENT SERVICES PROFESSIONALS

Schools in Pennsylvania have historically utilized three different types of student services professionals to support student mental health and success. School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers each function in similar and yet distinct roles dealing with student mental health, academic achievement, and human development. The differences are primarily in scope of reach – school counselors service all students, while school psychologists and school social workers service students identified as in need of or potentially in need of higher levels of intervention.

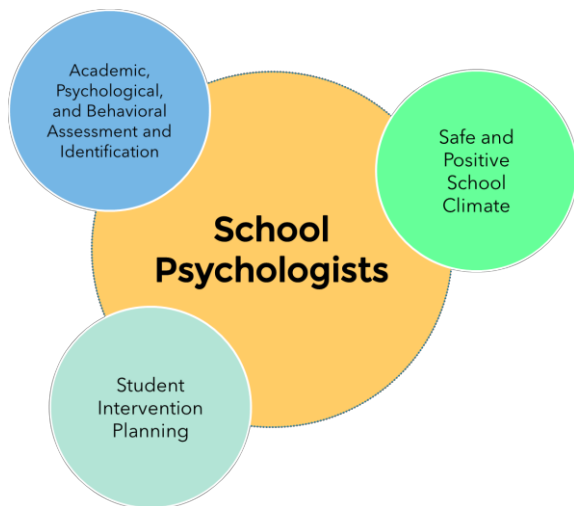
School nurses also work with all students and support their health and wellness, but their role and scope in schools is defined in Article XIV of the PA School Code of 1949, and is primarily focused on the physical health needs of students.

Current Pennsylvania Student Services Workforce (~8,200 total positions in SY 21-22)

School Counselors: **54%** School Nurses: **24%** School Psychologists: **16%** School Social Workers: **6%**
PDE Professional Personnel Individual Staffing Report

Deliver comprehensive school counseling services that address and support all students' developmental needs and growth.

- Standards-Aligned Classroom Instruction
- Individual Student Planning
- Responsive Services
 - Individual and Group Counseling
 - Crisis Response
- Referral Services

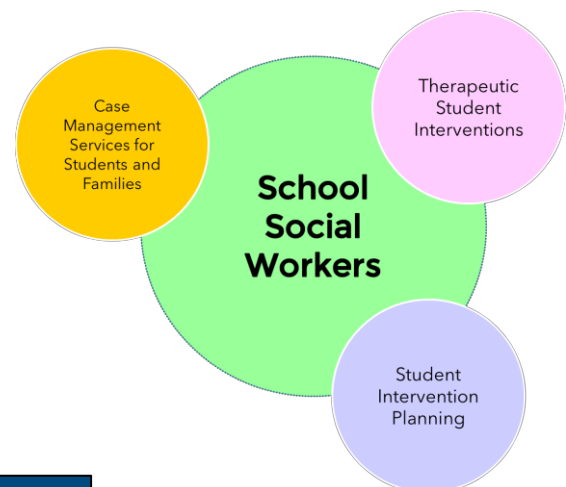


Evaluate and assess student concerns with individual academic achievement and behavioral health.

- Assessments and Identification
- Individualized Education Planning (IEPs)
- Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

Support students and families in need of basic resources, direct interventions, and case management services, providing a bridge between the school and a student's home/family environment.

- Case Management
- Coordination of Care
- Direct Therapeutic Services and Interventions for Students Demonstrating High Levels of Need



CURRENT CHALLENGES TO STUDENT ACCESS

SCHOOL COUNSELING IS NOT A GUARANTEED OR CONSISTENT SERVICE

The Pennsylvania Code requires all school entities to design and implement a “comprehensive and integrated” plan of student services (22 Pa. Code Chapter 12), however the definitions and requirements of this plan are so broad that they do not clearly define what these services actually are.

While “guidance counseling” is included in the description of “Developmental Services” along with psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services, under the definitions of student services earlier in the chapter, the law says:

*Services **may include** school guidance counseling, health services (under Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) and 28 Pa. Code Chapter 23 (relating to school health)), psychological services, social work and home and school visitor services.*

Chapter 12 is a broad section of law not even specifically focused on student services, as it also includes information about Student Rights and Responsibilities, as well as requirements for student record keeping.

While there is a section of the Comprehensive Planning tool which schools must submit to PDE as part of strategic planning (22 Pa. Code Chapter 4) that references student services, it is limited to a self-reported checklist of very broad categories of services, and affirming a list of “Assurances” that also include statements regarding student rights (i.e. corporal punishment, hair and dress codes).

BOTTOM LINE

The intentionally broad and vague descriptions of student services – including school counseling – translate into a wide range of service delivery, both in terms of quality and quantity from one school to another. A lack of meaningful accountability enables many schools to exist without effective or efficient student services.

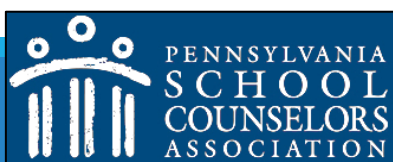
SCHOOL COUNSELING IS NOT SPECIFICALLY FUNDED

While school entities are required to design and implement a plan of student services, no specific funding stream exists to support these operations. Therefore, not only are schools required to define the majority of what these services look like, but they must also allocate resources to these services based on the realities of their local budget. This means that in some schools, student services are often on the table in discussions about cost-savings and cuts.

Despite the restriction that “school entities **may supplement, but may not supplant**, these (student) services through school-based, school-linked, or coordinated services provided by locally available social and human services agencies” (22 Pa. Code 12.16.i), many schools do this rather than investing in the hiring of school counselors or other student services professionals, as much of the existing funding opportunities for student mental health are grants, which are not generally recommended for long-term hiring decisions since this money is not guaranteed year to year. While community providers are a vital part of supporting students, they are not certified educators as required by law for student services professionals.

BOTTOM LINE

Student services like school counseling are vaguely required in schools via student services plans, however like all student services, the state does not provide specific funding beyond BEF allocations to be used directly for these services. **Funding is the primary driver for the kinds of services students can access in their school – NOT whether or not student needs are more or less prevalent.**



GOALS FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Pennsylvania is the **only state in America** that does not presently require defined school counseling programs or school counselors in our schools. Despite this, Pennsylvania schools have a solid foundational infrastructure to deliver primary developmental care through comprehensive school counseling programs that support the mental/social/emotional health, the academic development, and career planning needs of our students.

With almost 5,000 school counselors already working in our school systems across the Commonwealth, we have the potential to deliver the kinds of primary care (screening, intervention, and prevention) our students need as we help them navigate all the disruption they've experienced as a result of COVID-19.

To meet the needs of Pennsylvania's students, policymakers need to take action to guarantee our students get access to school counseling services that align with best practices, that school counselors can work with students appropriately in the scope of their expertise, and that enough school counselors work in our schools to support the needs of all students.

GOAL 1. DEFINE THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

SERVICES

PASS THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE

DEFINED USE OF TIME

MAXIMIZING EXISTING RESOURCES

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM SUPPORT



GOAL 2. INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS

STAFFING

REASONABLE STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS

CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY LEVEL

CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY BUILDING

WHICH EXPANDS EQUITY AND ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT

GOAL 1: DEFINE THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

DEFINE AND GUARANTEE SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

PA SCHOOL
CODE of 1949

The Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act, which was introduced in the House in 2021 and will be reintroduced in 2023, establishes guidelines for comprehensive school counseling services in schools by creating Article XIII-F in the PA School Code of 1949.

This act requires school districts to outline a comprehensive school counseling program that includes (but is not limited to) the following defined services:

- Academic Development and Planning
- Career Development and Planning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Interventions for Students At-Risk
- Orientation and Transition Support
- Collaborative Decision-Making

This act also requires school counselors to spend at least 80% of their time providing direct and indirect services to students, with a limit of no more than 20% of their time being used for administrative/non-counseling activities, such as test coordination, monitoring students in cafeterias/hallways/bus lines, or data entry.

This act also requires the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program that is:

- Written and posted publicly
- Implemented by Pennsylvania-certified school counselors
- Based on state and national frameworks for best practice
- Reviewed annually and updated in collaboration with stakeholders
- Systemically aligned K-12
- Based on annual goals aligned to the vision and mission statements of the district and program
- Focused on equitable access to opportunities for all students
- Based on student needs that are identified via a multilevel school data review

This act also directs the Department of Education to monitor school plans to ensure implementation and compliance with the guidelines and definitions laid out in this act.

UPDATE REGULATORY LANGUAGE

PA Code

An update to the regulatory language regarding student services in the PA Code will align with the Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act as follows:

22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.16.i

Services may include school guidance counseling services (under Article XIII-F of the Public School Code of 1949), health services (under Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) and 28 Pa. Code Chapter 23 (relating to school health)), psychological services, social work and home and school visitor services.

22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.41.b(1)

Developmental services include guidance school counseling services, psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services that support students in addressing their academic, behavioral, health, personal and social development issues.

EXISTING PENNSYLVANIA FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

Presently, Pennsylvania does not have either a state plan for comprehensive school counseling services or mandated school counseling positions in schools. Despite this, there are existing systems that broadly define school counseling professionals and some of the services they provide to students and schools. In the absence of explicit definition and scope of practice, the way Pennsylvania schools utilize certified school counselors can look quite different from one place to another, even within the same school district.

EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST (22 Pa. Code 49.1)

CERTIFICATION

Professional certified personnel whose primary responsibility is to render professional service other than classroom teaching, such as dental hygienist, home and school visitor, instructional technology specialist, social restoration specialist, nutrition service specialist, **elementary counselor, secondary counselor**, school nurse and school psychologist.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>A. The educational specialist understands the central concepts, structures and delivery styles of the professional area in which the educational specialist practices and can foster learning experiences for all students.</p> <p>B. The educational specialist understands how all children learn and develop, and can contribute to the provision of learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, career and personal development.</p> <p>C. The educational specialist understands how students differ in their ability and approaches to learning and creates opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.</p> <p>D. The educational specialist understands and uses a variety of professional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.</p> <p>E. The educational specialist uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning and self-motivation.</p> | <p>F. The educational specialist uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques supported by appropriate technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in and out of the classroom.</p> <p>G. The educational specialist plans professional services based upon knowledge of professional field, students, the community and curriculum goals.</p> <p>H. The educational specialist understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.</p> <p>I. The educational specialist thinks systematically about practice, learns from experience, seeks the advice of others, draws upon educational research and scholarship and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.</p> <p>J. The educational specialist contributes to school effectiveness by collaborating with other educators and parents, by using community resources, and by working as an advocate for change to improve opportunities for student learning.</p> |
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CERTIFICATION AND STAFFING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

CERTIFICATION

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR (PK-12) (CSPG 76)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in accordance with 22 Pa. Code § 49.13(b)(10), developed the Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines (CSPG) to provide guidance involving compliance with state laws governing certification and staffing practices in school entities within the Commonwealth. The CSPGs also provide clarification to educators regarding (1) the issuance of professional certificates, (2) the grade level and content scope of certificate subject areas and (3) the appropriate certificate for staffing professional positions in public schools. In the CSPGs, you will find valuable information related to certificate eligibility as well as the proper staffing practices that will help achieve educational excellence in the schools of the Commonwealth.

<p>An educator holding a valid Pennsylvania certificate for Elementary and Secondary School Counselor is responsible for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program.</p> <p>The certified School Counselor collaborates with others to meet student needs in three areas:</p>	ACADEMIC	CAREER-PLANNING	PERSONAL-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interprets cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests Participates in special education individualized education programs (IEP's) Assists in the educational placement (transition) of departing students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with career program planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation Coordinates student work-release programs in which students meet specific academic and work experience requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts classroom guidance activities Provides individual and group counseling related to academic or personal social development including peer mediation and bullying Provides intervention and prevention

Each school entity shall prepare a **written plan for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated K-12 program of the student services** based on the needs of its students. Though the variety of student services offered will differ from school to school depending upon its size and the needs of its students, the following categories of services shall be provided by each school entity in planning its student services:

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES	STUDENT SERVICES MUST:
Address student developmental needs throughout their enrollment in school. Developmental services include guidance counseling , psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services that support students in addressing their academic, behavioral, health, personal and social development issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an integral part of the instructional program at all levels of the school system. • Provide information to students and parents or guardians about educational opportunities of the school's instructional program and how to access these opportunities. • Provide career information and assessments so that students and parents or guardians might become aware of the world of work and of a variety of career options available to individual students. • Provide basic health services outlined in Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P.S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) for students and information to parents or guardians about the health needs of their children. • Persons delivering student services shall be specifically licensed or certified as required by statute or regulation. • The Department of Education will provide guidelines and technical assistance to local education agencies in planning student services.
DIAGNOSTIC, INTERVENTION, AND REFERRAL SERVICES	
Address students who are experiencing problems attaining educational achievement appropriate to their learning potential. Student services staff use diagnostic services to identify barriers that limit a student's success in school. Intervention services actively engage student services staff in activities planned to reduce or eliminate specific barriers to student success. Student services staff may arrange for referrals to other school-based or school-linked professionals or may refer parents and guardians to appropriate community-based services for assistance.	
CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION SERVICES	
Consultation services are used by student services staff, in partnership with parents or guardians, to obtain assistance to address barriers and issues that are outside the scope of the student services professional. Consultation and coordination services may be used to assist in the diagnosis, intervention or referral of students who face barriers to success. Coordination services connect school resources with other available resources to assist students in meeting their educational objectives.	

DEFINITIONS (22 Pa. Code 12.16)	STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (22 Pa. Code 12.42)
<p><i>Student services</i>—Services designed by a school entity to support the instructional program and to help students attain their educational and career goals.</p> <p>(i) Services may include school guidance counseling, health services (under Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) and 28 Pa. Code Chapter 23 (relating to school health)), psychological services, social work and home and school visitor services.</p> <p>(ii) School entities may supplement, but may not supplant, these services through school-based, school-linked, or coordinated services provided by locally available social and human services agencies.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth's student assistance program is designed to assist school personnel to identify issues, including alcohol, drugs and others, which pose a barrier to a student's learning and school success. Student assistance is not a treatment program; rather, it is a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning, and, where the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the parent and the student with information so they may access services within the community. The student assistance team members do not diagnose, treat or refer for treatment; but they may refer for an assessment for treatment.</p>

There shall be a written plan on file, approved by the local board of school directors, for the development and implementation of a **comprehensive, sequential program of guidance services** for kindergarten through 12th grade. The plan must include procedures to provide for guidance services to AVTs.

<p>1. Assistance to students in selecting vocational curricula that meet their needs and address their interests.</p> <p>School entity counseling services must ensure that counselors do not direct or urge any student to enroll in a particular career or program, or measure or predict a student's prospects for success in any career or program based upon the student's race, color, national origin, sex or disabilities. School entities cannot counsel students with disabilities toward more restrictive career objectives than students without disabilities and with similar abilities and interests.</p> <p>2. Assistance for all vocational students in making educational career plans including high school academic and technical preparation and postsecondary education and training, and adjustments through the use of individual and group counseling and appropriate student assessment procedures.</p> <p>3. Provision of occupational and educational information needed for realistic career planning in an organized, systematic fashion for students, parents and teachers.</p>	<p>4. Maintenance of cumulative records and the use, exchange and release of student information in accordance with § § 12.31 and 12.32 (relating to general requirements; and elements of the plan).</p> <p>5. Adequate orientation procedures for vocationally oriented pupils.</p> <p>6. Support of a placement service that is developmental and makes provisions for the transition from school to the world of work.</p> <p>7. Formal and informal consultation with teachers, administrators and other school staff.</p> <p>8. A school-initiated system of parental involvement.</p> <p>9. Liaison activities with community agencies.</p> <p>10. Assistance in the conduct of follow-up studies to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.</p>
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GOAL 2:

INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Schools in Pennsylvania are required to design and implement a plan of student services that addresses student needs, however there is no state funding tied directly to these services. As a result, schools are often left to make decisions about student services staffing based more on the demands of their local budget rather than on the needs of their students. Low-wealth school districts have less school counselors than high-wealth school districts, and so **funding is the primary driver for the kinds of services students can access in their school – NOT whether or not student needs are more or less prevalent.**

INCREASING OVERALL BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING (BEF)

OPTIONAL/
BROAD

PROS

By increasing state funding in general, local school districts would have more resources to utilize, and may use these resources to hire more school counselors.

CONS

School counselors are hired based on local decision-making, with no specific staffing requirements or funding sources. Schools may choose to use additional funding to hire school counselors, but they might use that funding for other needs. Without any required framework for school counseling programming or staffing, there is no way to guarantee any increased access to services for students.

EXPANDING GRANT-BASED OPPORTUNITIES

OPTIONAL/
TARGETED

PROS

There is an existing system of grants that can be used for hiring school counselors. The School Safety and Security Grant Program (PCCD) has delivered millions of dollars to school districts to student mental health support, which can include the hiring of staff. The Safe Schools Targeted Grants (PDE) provide a model that could be used to hire school counselors, as these targeted grants currently exist for school police officers and school resource officers.

CONS

Hiring school counselors is only one of many possible uses of School Safety and Security Grant funding. As schools must reapply each year to receive these funds, it is not a guaranteed source of revenue to make hiring decisions. Schools may choose to use additional funding to hire school counselors, but they might use that funding for other needs. Even if PDE established a Safe Schools Targeted Grant for school counselors, it would only impact schools that choose to apply for and are awarded the grant. Like the School Safety and Security grants, they are not a guaranteed source of revenue to make hiring decisions.

CREATE SPECIFIC STUDENT SERVICES FUNDING STREAM

SYSTEMIC/
IDEAL

PROS

Funding is guaranteed and distributed appropriately to school districts based on staffing needs, and could be determined using a formula that factors in student enrollment and weighted student factors, similar to the Fair Funding Formula. Staffing data exists that can identify schools in need of additional student services funding.

CONS

Because this funding stream does not currently exist, and because the legal framework for student services in Pennsylvania is vague, this would require attention both on the source(s) of funding, as well as the expectations and accountability for student services in all Pennsylvania schools.

EXISTING SCHOOL COUNSELING WORKFORCE

In SY 2021-2022, Pennsylvania’s schools employed almost 5,000 school counselors, with over 85% of these professionals working in the 499 brick and mortar school districts that serve the over one and a half million students that attend them. According to the Pennsylvania School Counselor Staffing Report (2023), the need for additional school counselors is especially needed in low-wealth school districts, where student needs are often higher. Despite a slight increase in hiring in the last several years, there are less school counselors working in Pennsylvania schools now than there were in 2010.

The Department of Education recognized in its testimony to the Commonwealth Court that “funding inequities are one of the fundamental root causes of achievement gaps and that increased funding is necessary to address them.” The Commonwealth Court also recognized that funding inequity translates into a lack of services for students in low-wealth school districts, saying “there was evidence that low-income students often require more support, so an adequate number of [school] counselors is needed to meet those needs.”

FUNDING DIRECTLY TRANSLATES INTO SERVICE INEQUITY

When comparing Title I schools with non-Title I schools across Pennsylvania, Title I schools need **twice the number of additional school counselors** hired to meet the recommended ratio of 1:250.

School counselors in Title I school buildings have significantly higher caseloads than school counselors in non-Title I school buildings, and these caseloads involve a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds.

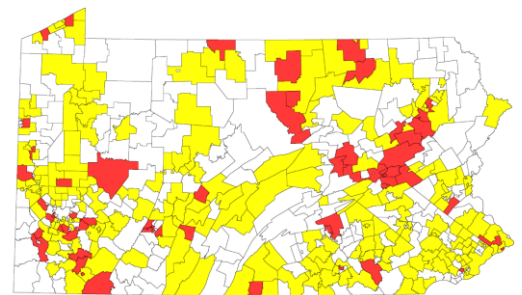


Total Public-School Buildings	Title I Schools	Non-Title I Schools	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	1,537	1,140	2,677
Average Ratio	1:422	1:356	1:393
Median Ratio	1:386	1:313	1:353
Additional School Counselors Needed for 1:250	1,122	610	1,732
Average % of Student Enrollment Non-White	42%	21%	33%
Average % of Student Enrollment ELL	5.6%	1.9%	4.1%

SCHOOL COUNSELOR TO STUDENT RATIOS ARE HIGH IN PENNSYLVANIA

The median school counselor to student ratio in Pennsylvania is **1:353**, with over 1 in 10 school buildings having an average building ratio of 1:500 or higher. Only 20% of school buildings in Pennsylvania meet the recommended school counselor to student ratio of 1:250.

Pennsylvania has 70% of the total school counselor workforce already hired and in place – half of school buildings need less than 0.5 additional school counselors to meet the recommended ratio.



MANY SCHOOL COUNSELORS ARE ASSIGNED TO MULTIPLE BUILDINGS

225 school districts (45%) have buildings served by school counselors who are assigned to multiple buildings, impacting over a **quarter of a million students**, mostly **elementary school children**.

In practice, this means a school counselor might be assigned to two elementary schools, and only be physically present in each two or three days a week. This puts increased demand on the school counselor to be able to establish relationships not only with multiple groups of students, but multiple sets of staff, administration, parents, and communities.

