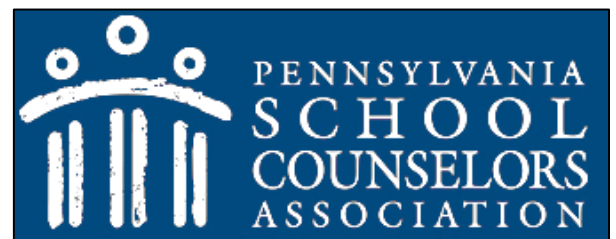


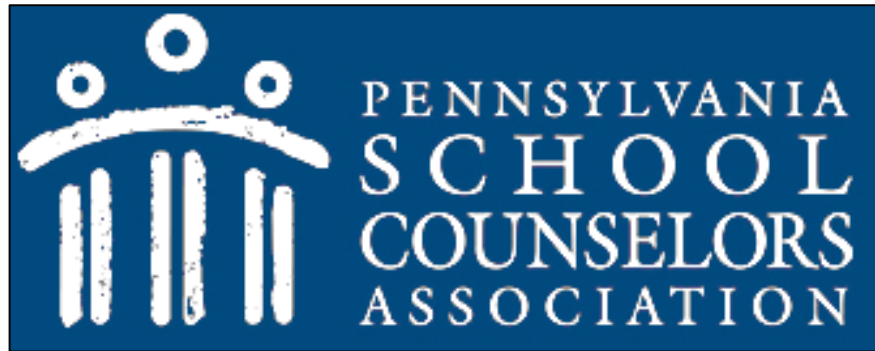
Pennsylvania School Counselor Staffing Report

SY 2020-2021

A REVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA'S
STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS

FEBRUARY 2022





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.

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Emilia Peiffer

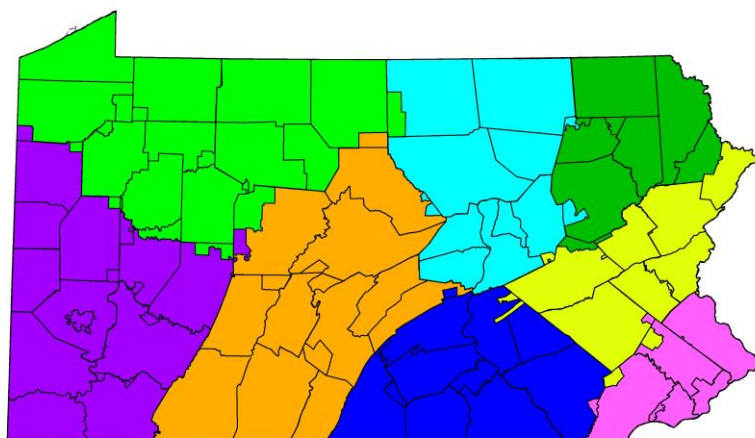
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Special thanks is given to Adam Oldham and the PSCA Government Relations committee for their work in developing this report.

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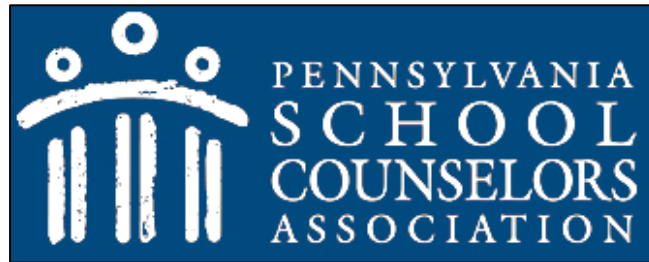
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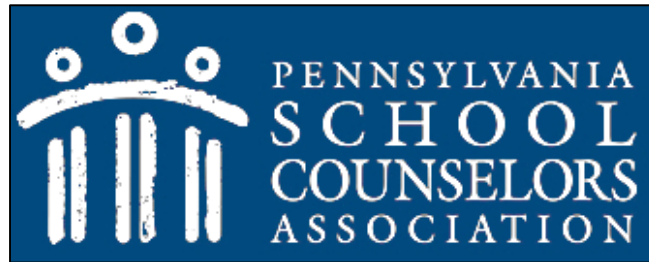


What is This Report For?

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, and will be released each year during National School Counseling Week.



CALL TO ACTION

School Counselors for All Students

Reasonable
Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Level

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Building

Defined Use of Time

Who are School Counselors?

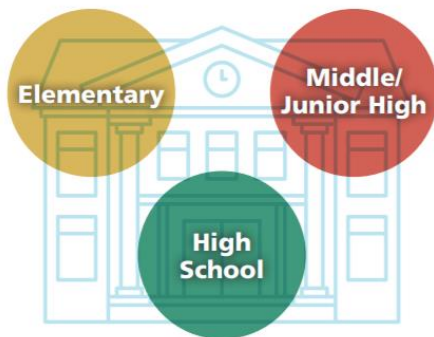
(The Role of the School Counselor, American School Counselor Association)

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:

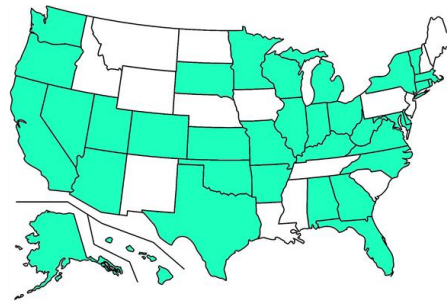
- Consultation
- Collaboration
- Referrals

School Counselors in American Schools

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

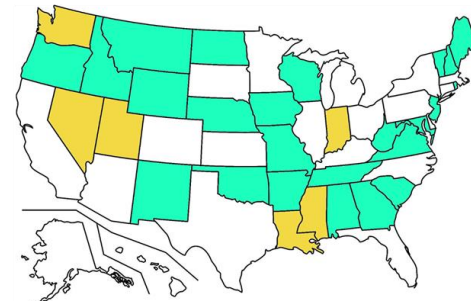
The two primary ways states incorporate school counseling services into schools are (1) requiring districts to develop comprehensive school counseling programs and (2) mandating school counselor positions in school buildings.

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



Comprehensive school counseling programs required in public school districts

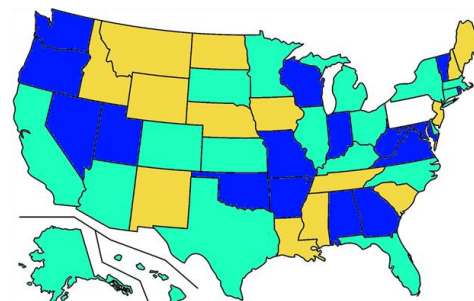
**35
states**



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

School counselors required in public school districts

30
states



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

49
states

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 430:1 (ASCA, 2020)

ASCA reports that Pennsylvania's ratio for the 2019-2020 school year was 360:1 (ASCA, 2021)

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

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

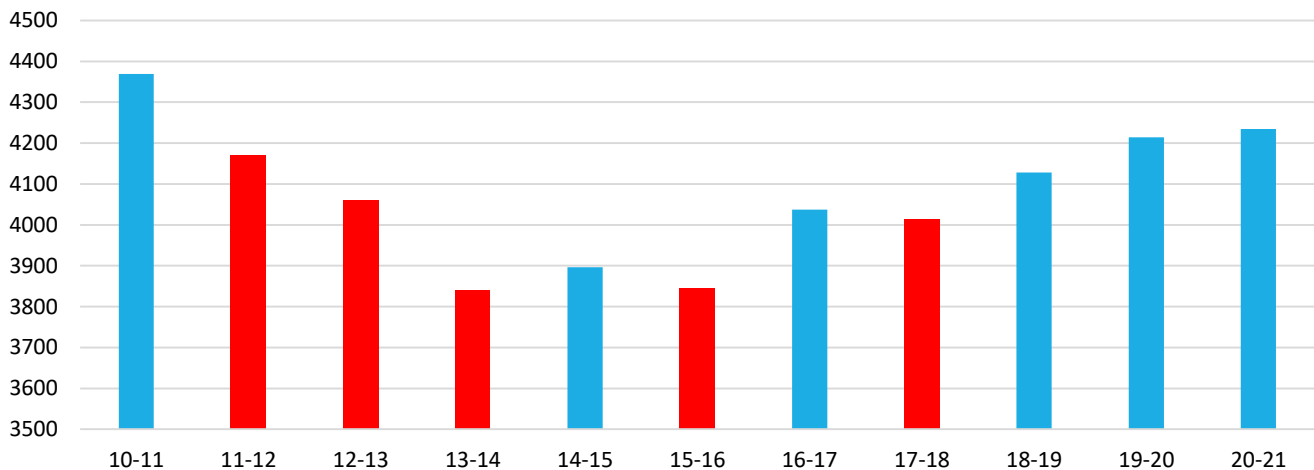
Each year, the PA Department of Education releases the Professional Personnel ID Report listing out every public educator, and each assignment they had during the previous school year. Because each educator can have multiple assignments, the number of school counselors was determined by tabulating the 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 106 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*



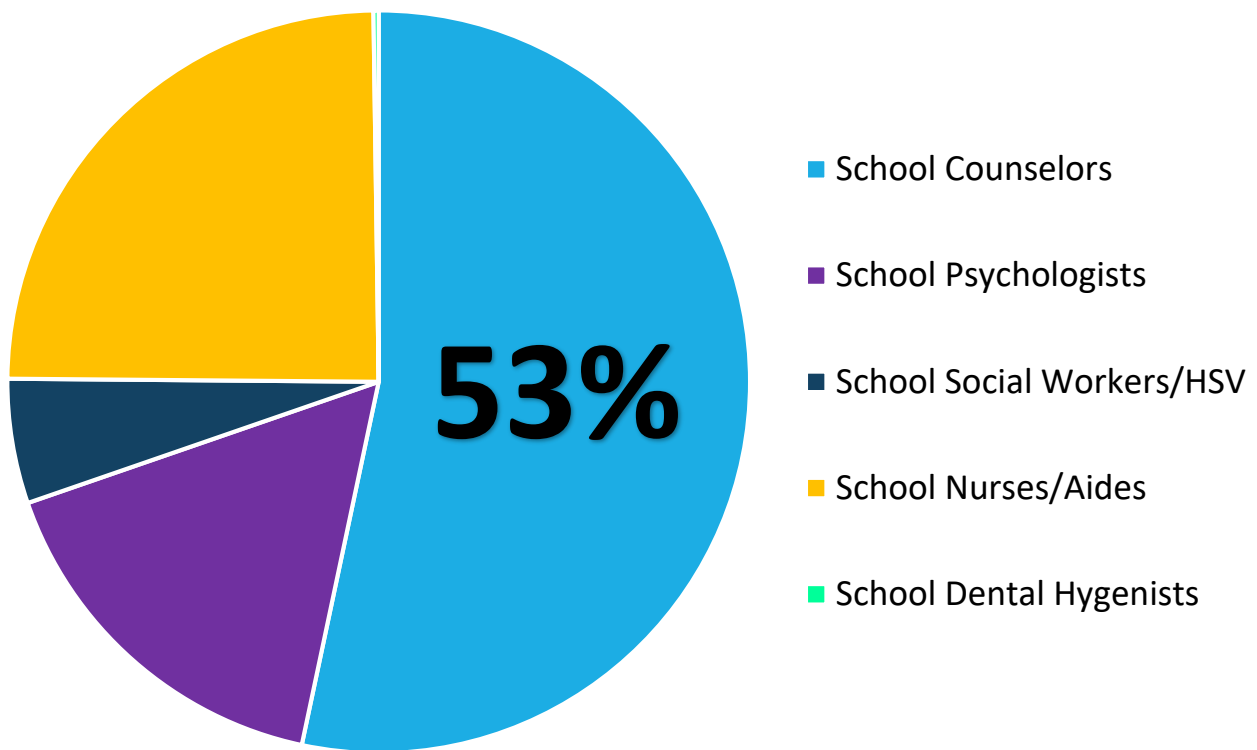
10 Year School Counselor Staffing Review	# of School Counselors*		
	Elementary	Secondary	Total
SY 2010-2011	1,660	2,709	4,369
SY 2020-2021	1,742	2,493	4,235
Change in School Counselor Staffing	+ 82	- 216	- 134

Since 2010,
there has been a net loss
of 134 school counselors
in Pennsylvania Public School Districts.

*Annual PDE Professional Personnel Individual Staffing Reports (2010-2021)

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

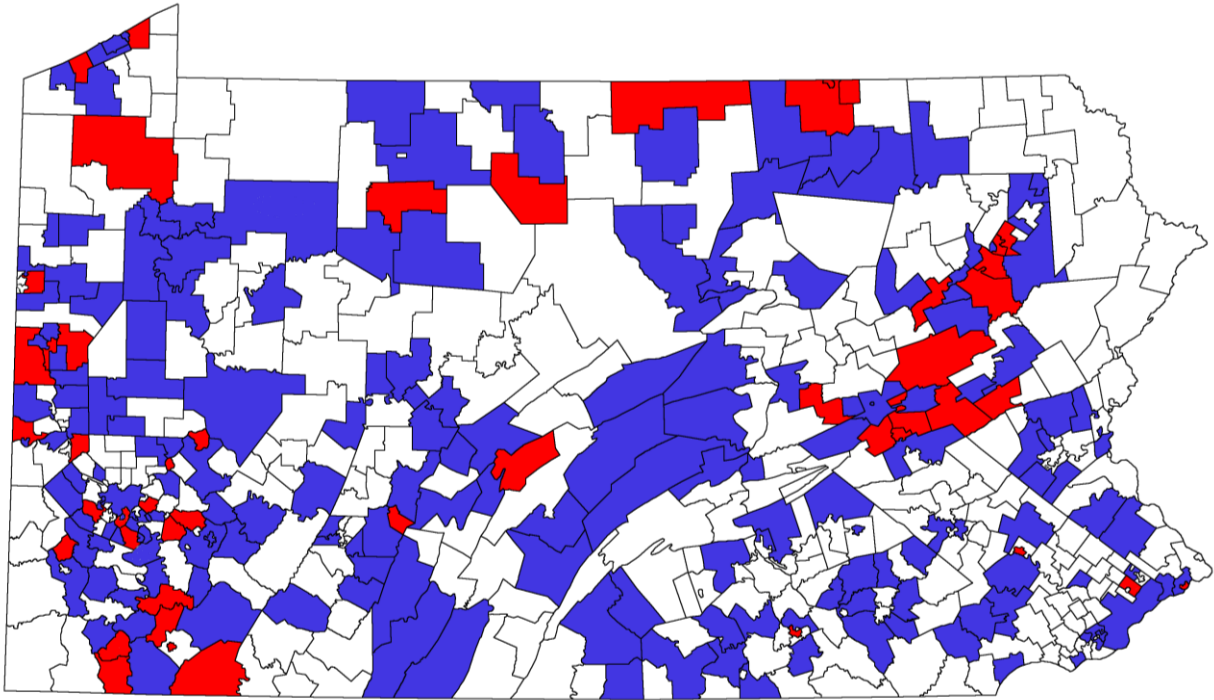
Student/Pupil Services Professionals (SY 20-21)



Totaling 53%,
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



1:361

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

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

1 in 10 PA Public School Districts
have average 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	212
550 or Higher	311
450 to 550	354
350 to 450	577
250 to 350	755
250 or Less	476
Total	2685

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	212	143	17	19	21	7	5
550 or Higher	311	238	34	22	12	5	0
450 to 550	354	268	25	37	16	8	0
350 to 450	577	380	24	96	45	32	0
250 to 350	755	304	26	187	169	67	2
250 or Less	476	142	22	91	170	48	3
Total	2685	1475	148	452	433	167	10

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)	1475	1 : 444	1 : 416	143
Middle (6-8)	452	1 : 346	1 : 321	19
High (9-12)	433	1 : 299	1 : 275	21
Total	2360	-	-	183

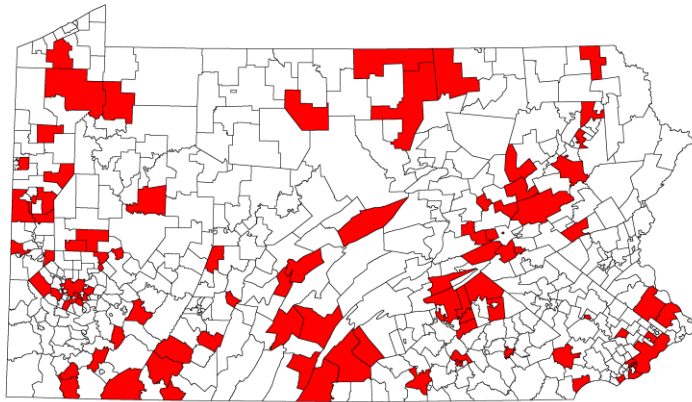
88% of Pennsylvania's school buildings are configured by standard grade level (Elementary, Middle, High). Note that elementary school buildings may be primary schools (K-2), intermediate schools (3-5), elementary schools (K-5 or K-6), or another variation of the K-6 grade band.

Building Level Configuration	# of Buildings	Average Ratio	Median Ratio	No SC Listed
ELE + MS (K-8)	148	1 : 516	1 : 431	17
MS + HS (5-12, 6-12, 7-12)	167	1 : 325	1 : 303	6
ELE + MS + HS (K-12)*	10	-	-	5
Total	325	-	-	28

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	212	76%
550 or Higher	311	71%
450 to 550	354	70%
350 to 450	577	60%
250 to 350	755	46%
250 or Less	476	45%

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

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity

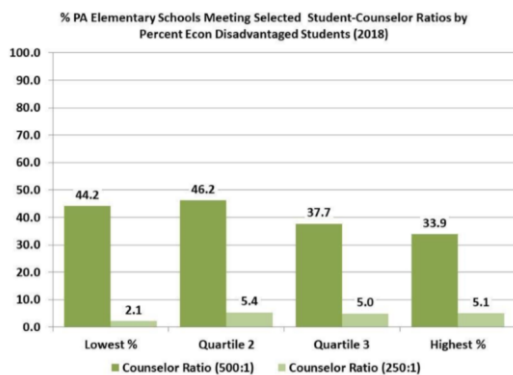
Total Public-School Buildings	No School Counselors Assigned	At Least a Fraction of a School Counselor Assigned	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	212	2,474	2,685
% Title I	77%	56%	57%
Average % of Student Enrollment (not White)	47%	31%	32%
Median % of Student Enrollment Economically Disadvantaged	57%	43%	44%

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

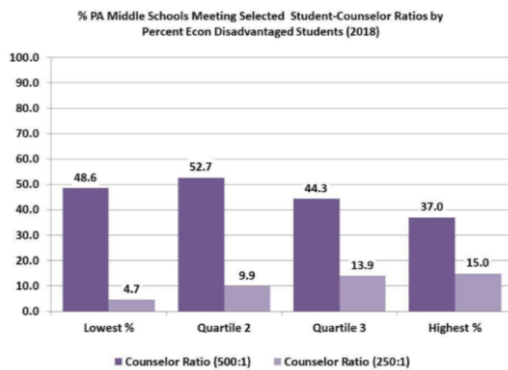
...school buildings without any school counselors assigned are:

- 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

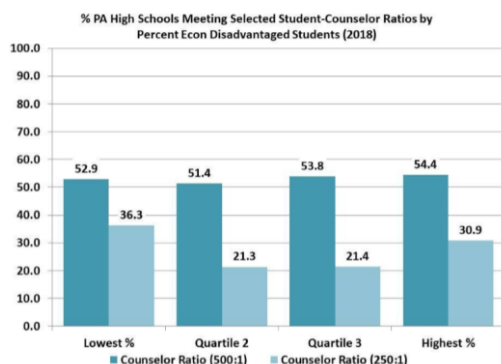


Research from Dr. Edward Fuller, Associate Professor and the Director for the Penn State Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis (PCEPA) shows that schools serving student populations with higher levels of poverty are likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios.



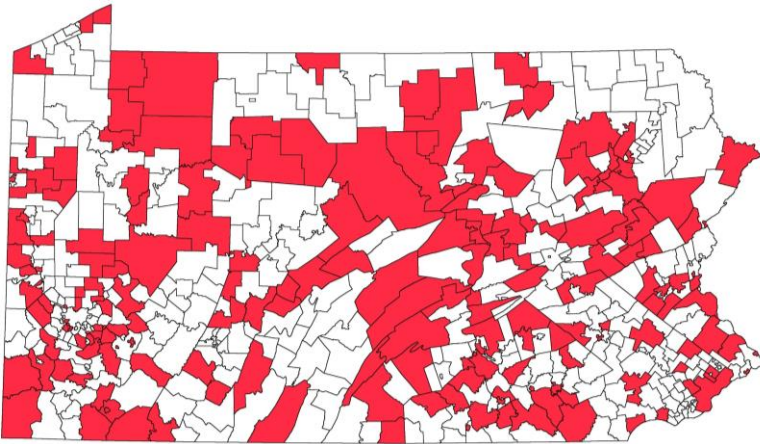
Public School Buildings with At Least a Fraction of a School Counselor Assigned	Title I Schools	Non-Title I School	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	1,543	1,147	2,690
Average Ratio	462:1	366:1	419:1
Median Ratio	428:1	331:1	377:1
Average % of Student Enrollment Non-White	41%	19%	31%
Average % of Student Enrollment English Language Learner	5.2%	1.7%	3.7%

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



44%

222 school districts (44%) 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
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	6,229	6,028
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings	4,195	4,207
Total School Counselors Needed	2,034	1,821

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

62%

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

70% 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	780
Buildings Needing at Least 1.0-1.99 Additional SC	739
Buildings Needing at Least 2.0-2.99 Additional SC	128
Buildings Needing at Least 3.0+ Additional SC	30
Total Buildings	1677

Less School Counselors Needed? Context Matters

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

Calculating the number of school counselors needed in each school building is based on each school building's student enrollment. Between SY 19-20 and SY 20-21, there were **significant changes in public school district enrollment** – likely due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Public School Enrollment Reports	School District Enrollment	Cyber/Charter Enrollment
SY 2019-2020	1,566,855	146,556
SY 2020-2021	1,516,271	169,252
Change in Enrollment	- 50,584	+ 22,696

Despite an increase of over 20,000 students, there was **not a significant change** in the number of school counselors working in cyber/charter schools.

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

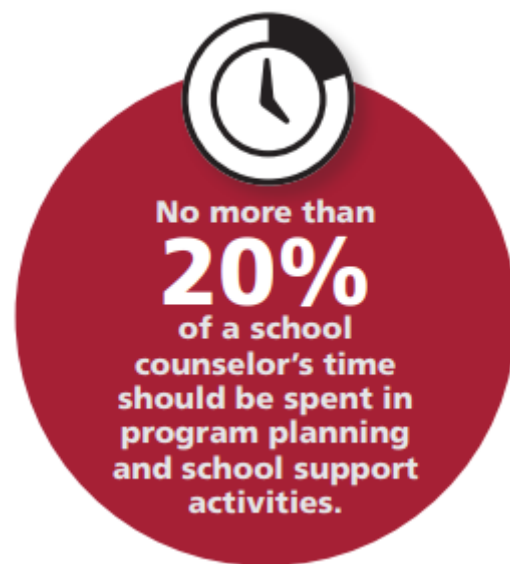
\$130 MILLION

Number of School Buildings	2,685
Number of Students	1,507,134
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	6,028
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings (SY 20-21)	4,207
Total School Counselors Needed	1,821
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 20-21)	\$73,658

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.

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.



“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)

STUDENT CAREER READINESS

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”

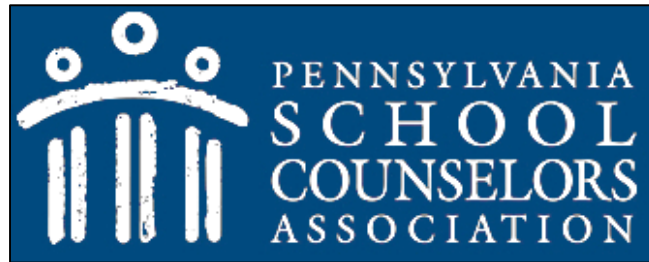
“Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that does not require standardized school guidance counseling services in all schools. To make matters worse, as students were forced to pivot during COVID-19, their access to academic planning and career preparation opportunities suffered – all of which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

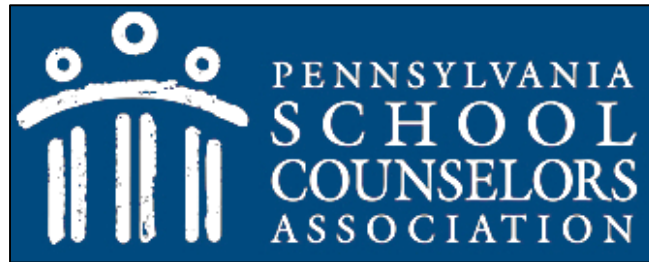
School Counselors for All Students

Reasonable
Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Level

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Building

Defined Use of Time



CALL TO ACTION SUMMARY

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

- 1 in 10 school districts have ratios of 1:500 or higher
- Almost 50% of PA school districts have average ratios of 1:350 or higher

A Certified School Counselor for Every Level

- Of the 212 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

- 44% 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

Defined Use of Time (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

PA SC Ratios Methodology

PDE PA Professional Personnel ID Report (2020-2021)

- 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 (2020-2021)

- 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

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