

# THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT

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A VISION FOR EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE  
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES  
FOR ALL PENNSYLVANIA STUDENTS

JANUARY 2024

# BRINGING PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING INTO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

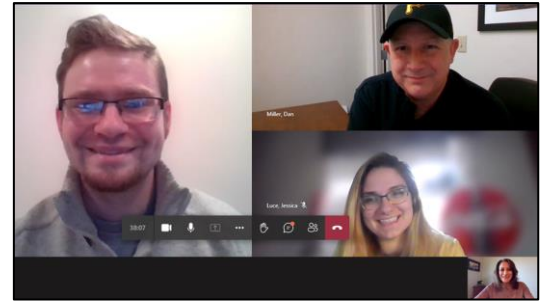
In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across America were looking for solutions to support students in their return to school. Our society had experienced an unprecedented level of upheaval, and while student mental health needs had been increasingly concerning in the years leading up to 2020, the pandemic exasperated these needs even more.

PSCA began meeting with members of the General Assembly in the spring of 2021 to discuss the role and expertise of school counselors, and how school counselors are uniquely trained to support healthy and holistic student development. Through researching how other states guarantee student access to school counseling services, PSCA began advocating for a Pennsylvania state framework for comprehensive school counseling programs. This evolved into the Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act.

The Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act was first introduced into the Pennsylvania House of Representatives by Representative Dan Miller from Allegheny county as House Bill 1825 on September 8, 2021. PSCA met with members of both the Pennsylvania House and Senate, including the chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees to articulate the need for school counseling reform. HB 1825 was not brought up for discussion in committee, however school counselors across the state participated in letter writing and meetings with their elected officials in support of this legislation.

In January and February 2023, PSCA met with Pennsylvania Department of Education Secretaries Eric Hagarty and Khalid Mumin to discuss the need for state leadership and coordination of school counseling services. After several years of advocacy efforts, PDE announced the hiring of a School Counseling Advisor in March 2023 (former Pennsylvania School Counselor of the year Karen Rubican).

In March 2023, the Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act was again introduced as House Bill 662 by Representative Dan Miller. In September 2023, the bill was reintroduced as House Bill 1665 by Representative Mandy Steele. PSCA continued to meet with members of the General Assembly, and after meeting with House Education Committee chair Representative Pete Schweyer from Lehigh county, there was momentum for this legislation to see discussion at a committee hearing in early 2024. On January 18, 2024, at the conclusion of a House Education Committee hearing on mental health in schools, the committee voted to move HB 1665 on to a full House vote later in the spring.



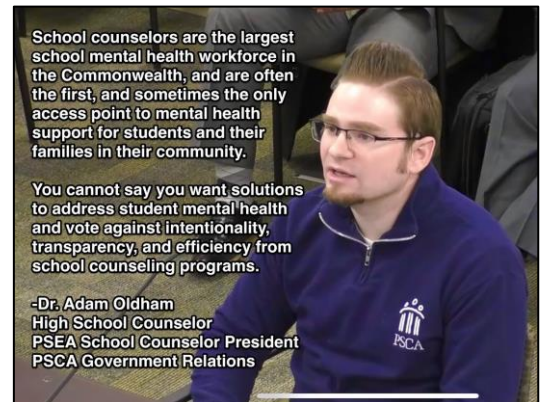
Meeting with Representative Dan Miller in March 2021



Meeting with PDE Secretary Eric Hagarty in January 2023



Meeting with House Education Committee chair Pete Schweyer in June 2023



House Education Committee Hearing on January 17, 2024

# WHY DOES PA NEED THIS?

*Pennsylvania is the ONLY state in America that does not guarantee student access to school counseling services.*

*Pennsylvania trains and certifies highly qualified school counselors every year, but these professionals often discover that their job responsibilities look very different than what they learned to do in graduate school.*

*In some schools, school counselors spend significant time performing non-counseling tasks despite being trained to support students in need.*

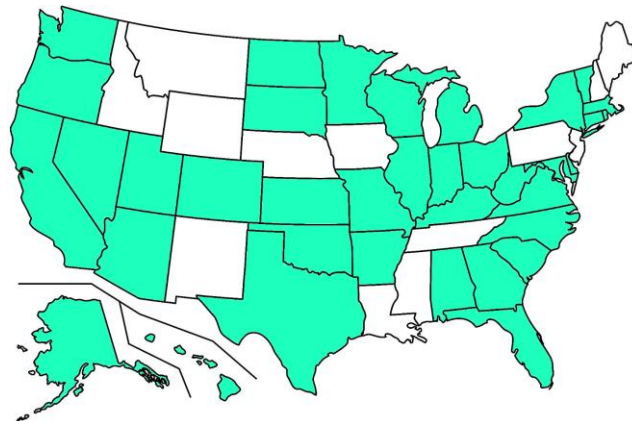
*Our students are struggling through a nationwide mental health epidemic.*

*Students struggle to connect their school experiences to a broader sense of purpose and career plan as they move from elementary school to high school.*

*Our workforce pipeline needs improvement in all sectors of industry.*

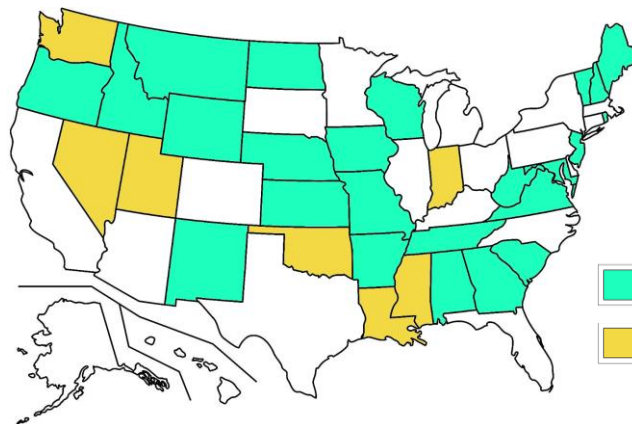
*School counselors are uniquely trained to address these needs, but are too often unable to deliver these services due to a lack of role protection and definition.*

## SCHOOL COUNSELING ACROSS AMERICA



37  
STATES

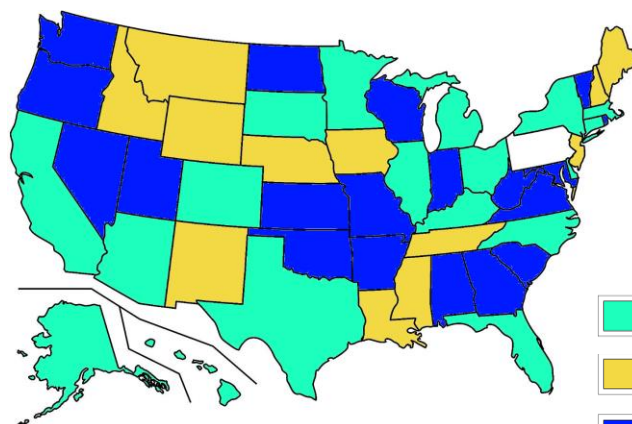
States which require comprehensive school counseling programs in all public school districts



31  
STATES

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

States which require school counselors in public school districts



49  
STATES

State Comprehensive School Counseling Plans/Framework  
School Counselors Partial/Full K-12 Required in Schools  
Comprehensive Plans AND School Counselor Requirements

States which require comprehensive school counseling programs and/or school counselors in public school districts.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA). *State requirements and programs.*

# WHAT IS THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT?

Pennsylvania is the **only state in America** that does not require defined school counseling programs or school counselors in our schools. Comprehensive school counseling programs support the mental/social/emotional health, the academic development, and career planning needs of our students.

The Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act would establish guidelines for comprehensive school counseling services in schools, which deliver the kinds of primary care students need to support their mental health and school success.

## DEFINING SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

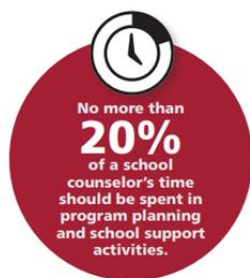
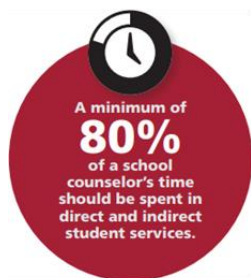
This act would require school districts to outline a comprehensive school counseling program that includes (but is not limited to) the following defined services:

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



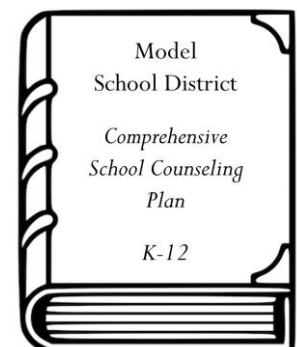
## GUARANTEEING SERVICE AVAILABILITY

This act would also require 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.



## PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

This act would require schools to post their comprehensive school counseling program publicly on their website to increase visibility and transparency of the services available to students and families. This includes collaboratively designed annual goals aligned to district vision and mission priorities for student outcomes and success.



# COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PLAN

*(PA School Counseling Services Act – HB 1665)*

Each school entity shall **develop and implement a written comprehensive school counseling plan** that ensures that student services are coordinated in a manner that provides comprehensive and developmental support to all students of the school entity.

## A PLAN MUST:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be implemented by a Pennsylvania-certified school counselor or counseling team working within each school in the school entity.</li> <li>2. Utilize nationally recognized and State-recognized counselor frameworks.</li> <li>3. Be reviewed annually and updated as needed by the school counselor or counseling team, in collaboration with each affected building principal as well as other stakeholders and staff of each school entity.</li> <li>4. Be systemically aligned from kindergarten through grade 12 within the school entity, including transitions across schools within the school entity.</li> <li>5. Include sections for each grade and building within the school entity, including student transitions between grades and buildings as well as student transition to other school entities.</li> <li>6. Be reflected in and integrated alongside the school entity's student services plan as required under 22 Pa. Code 4.13 (relating to strategic plans) or any successor regulation</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Guide students in academic pursuits, career planning, and social and emotional learning.</li> <li>2. Follow the comprehensive school counseling program guidance provided by the department.</li> <li>3. Include goals that are developed annually based on the vision and mission statements that are shared by stakeholders to ensure equitable access to opportunities for all students.</li> <li>4. Identify student needs through a multilevel school data review that includes: data analysis, use-of-time data review, program results data, communication and contact with administrators, students, parents, and guardians of students and stakeholders</li> </ol> |
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## A PLAN MUST CONTAIN:

### A FOUNDATION component

Vision statement  
Mission statement  
Goals

### A DELIVERY component

Focuses on direct services and indirect services through the implementation of the plan (building-level plans, grade-level plans, plans for students with special needs/exceptionalities)

### A MANAGEMENT component

Utilizes assessments and other data to develop, implement, and evaluate the plan

### An ACCOUNTABILITY component

Ensures regular analysis of the plan

Sufficient time at each school entity shall be allotted for the school entity's counselor to carry out the duties stated in the school entity's plan.

## DIRECT AND INDIRECT STUDENT SERVICES

*“At least 80% of SC time”*

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

Each school entity shall be responsible for posting its plan on the school entity's publicly accessible Internet website or, in the alternative, on the publicly accessible Internet website of the school entity's school district, under the category of State-required information.

## EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES PER HB 1665

### Academic Development

- Implementing an individual planning system to connect academic coursework to long-term life goals and plans
- Guiding a student along the pathways to graduation.
- Addressing academic deficits and the accessibility of resources.

### College and Career Development

- Personalized career plans for every student
- Information and resource sharing with parents and families regarding post-secondary planning
- Exploration of all post-secondary options (college, career, military, apprenticeship, etc.)

### Social/Emotional Development

- Healthy communication and social skill development
- Healthy coping strategies and resiliency skill development
- Suicide prevention, intervention, and response
- Bullying prevention

### Interventions for Students at Risk

- Intervening with students who are at risk of dropping out of school to determine if there is a way to keep the students in school.

### Orientation and Transition

- Supporting new students transferring into the district
- Supporting students transferring out of the district
- Grade and building-level transitions

### Collaborative Decision Making

- Serving as a contributing member of decision-making teams and programs, which may include MTSS/RTI, ELD programs, Parent involvement/family engagement programs, PBIS programs, AP/Gifted programs, and special education services

## WHY DO WE NEED THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT?

✓ **Pennsylvania is the ONLY state in America that does not guarantee school counseling services to its students.** Other states require comprehensive school counseling programs, or require building/ratio-level staffing. Some even do both of those things!

✓ **Our students are in the midst of a mental health epidemic** as evidenced by increased levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts/behavior. This is true in national-level data from the CDC, as well as in Pennsylvania-specific data from the PAYS survey. Students urgently need effective and efficient supports.

✓ Recruiting and retaining a high quality school counseling workforce in Pennsylvania is difficult when new hires discover the jobs they wanted and were trained to do **are NOT the jobs they GET to do in Pennsylvania schools.**

## COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED

- ✓ Be implemented by a Pennsylvania-certified school counselor or counseling team working within each school in the school entity.
- ✓ Utilize nationally recognized and State-recognized counselor frameworks.
- ✓ Be systemically aligned from kindergarten through grade 12 within the school entity, including transitions across schools within the school entity.
- ✓ Include sections for each grade and building within the school entity, including student transitions between grades and buildings as well as student transition to other school entities.

## COLLABORATIVE NEEDS-BASED DESIGN

- ✓ Include goals that are developed annually based on the vision and mission statements that are shared by stakeholders to ensure equitable access to opportunities for all students.
- ✓ Be reviewed annually and updated as needed by the school counselor or counseling team, in collaboration with each affected building principal as well as other stakeholders and staff of each school entity.
- ✓ Identify student needs through a multilevel school data review that includes: data analysis, use-of-time data review, program results data, communication and contact with administrators, students, parents, and guardians of students and stakeholders

# HOW DOES PENNSYLVANIA CURRENTLY DEFINE SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SERVICES?

## 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 certified educators 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 social-emotional 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.**

# 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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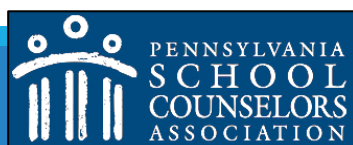
## CERTIFICATION AND STAFFING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

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





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 <b>include</b> <b>guidance counseling</b> , 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"> <li>• Be an <b>integral part of the instructional program at all levels</b> of the school system.</li> <li>• Provide information to students and parents or guardians about <b>educational opportunities</b> of the school's instructional program and how to access these opportunities.</li> <li>• <b>Provide career information and assessments</b> 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.</li> <li>• Provide <b>basic health services</b> 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.</li> <li>• Persons delivering student services shall be <b>specifically licensed or certified</b> as required by statute or regulation.</li> <li>• The Department of Education will <b>provide guidelines and technical assistance</b> to local education agencies in planning student services.</li> </ul>
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 <b>may include</b> <b>school guidance counseling</b>, 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 <b>may supplement, but may not supplant</b>, 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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# WHAT ABOUT STUDENT SERVICES PLANS (“CHAPTER 12”)? AREN’T THEY SCHOOL COUNSELING PLANS?

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.

# WHAT ABOUT K-12 GUIDANCE PLANS (“339”)? AREN’T THEY SCHOOL COUNSELING PLANS?

Per PDE, “Title 22 Chapter 339 Career and Technical Education Standards require all schools that either have PDE-approved career and technical education programs or send their grades 9-12 students to another school for PDE-approved career and technical education program instruction to have a K-12 Guidance Plan.”

22 Pa. Code Chapter 339 is “Vocational Education,” and primarily focuses on the logistics of school entities that provide **career and technical education** programs. In other words, it is primarily concerned **not** with school counselors and the work they do in schools with students, but on career and technical education programs.

The legal requirement of the “339 plan” is primarily focused on ensuring that all students are aware of CTE programs, that no one is discriminated against any opportunity to participate in a CTE program, and that all students enrolled in CTE programs receive assistance in their career planning process.

**This is NOT a comprehensive school counseling program, nor is it required to be delivered by certified school counselors.** The only references to “counselors” in all of Chapter 339 are concerned with ensuring no discriminatory practices toward students take place in providing information about the opportunities available through career and technical education.

## **BOTTOM LINE**

While school counselors are often heavily involved in career development programming in their school districts, **there is no legal requirement or framework that requires this.** Chapter 339 is often interpreted generously as applying to all students and their career development needs, but even a broad interpretation does **not** demonstrate any expectation for comprehensive school counseling programs in Pennsylvania schools.

# IN SUMMARY

## *Elevator Pitch for the Pennsylvania School Counseling Services Act*

Over the last several years, Pennsylvania students have faced perhaps the greatest disruption ever to impact our school systems and communities. The global pandemic of COVID-19 closed our school buildings, impacted how students 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.

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. Student mental health needs are at a crisis point:

- 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<sup>1</sup>.
- Mental and behavioral health concerns have been and continue to be the top referral categories through Pennsylvania's anonymous student reporting app Safe2Say Something<sup>2</sup>.
- The rates of teenage suicide have been on the rise for the past decade<sup>3</sup>, 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<sup>4</sup>.

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 or 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.**

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.

The School Counseling Services Act (HB 1665) 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.

### **BOTTOM LINE**

- **Defined Scope of School Counseling Practice Maximizes Professional Expertise**
- **Written K-12 Comprehensive School Counseling Plans Aligned to Best Practices**
- **No Less than 80% of School Counselor Time Dedicated to Working with Students**
- **Accountability to Ensure Services Exist for All Students**

1 - Center for Reinventing Public Education (2022). *The State of the American Student: A Guide to Pandemic Recovery and Reinvention*

2 - Department of the Attorney General (2022). *Safe2Say Something Annual Reports*

3 - CDC (2020). *State Suicide Rates Among Adolescents and Young Adults Aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2018*; CDC (2023). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*.

4 - PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (2021). *2021 PA Youth Survey (PAYS) Statewide Report Highlights*

