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The Connecticut School Counselor Association

*A chartered state division of the American School Counselor Association since 1963*

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# 2019 Policy Priorities

In 2018, legislators approved Public Act 18-15- An Act Concerning School Counselors, which adds school counselors to many of Connecticut’s statutes. School counselors play an essential role in schools in Connecticut and the Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) wants to increase access to school counselors for students across the state.

Our 2019 policy priorities aim to better meet the needs of Connecticut students. We believe this can be achieved by 1) Requiring Comprehensive School Counseling Programs 2) Directing Funding to School Support Services and Staff, 3) Improving Student to Counselor Ratios and 4) Ensuring Classroom Safety through promotion of social emotional learning.

**Requiring Comprehensive School Counseling Programs**

CSCA strongly supports efforts to create a statewide school counseling program that can be adopted and implemented in local school districts.

* Connecticut does not require public school districts to employ certified school counselors at any level.
* Of the 206 public school districts in Connecticut, only 58 districts have elementary schools with school counseling programs (based on 2014-2015 CSDE data).
* Ensure that all of Connecticut’s public-school students have access to comprehensive school counseling programming **(K-12),** implemented by certified school counseling personnel.
  + The needs of underrepresented populations for college and career readiness are best serviced within a comprehensive school counseling program.
* Require that the term “school counselor” apply only to certified school counselors
  + The title “school counselor” requires a Master’s degree with specific counseling course work and fieldwork experiences in school counseling.

**Directing Funding to School Support Services & Staff**

The State spends hundreds of millions of dollars on education funding that goes to local school districts. Funding has been widely criticized with varying proposals to reform the Education Cost Sharing formula. Policymakers and advocates have for years discussed the need for additional school support services and CSCA believes local school systems should have the opportunity for specific funds devoted to school support services.

* On the federal level, Senator Jeff Merkley and Congresswoman Katherine Clark introduced the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act, new bicameral legislation that would help fill the critical unmet need for school-based mental health services providers in elementary and secondary schools in America.
* The proposal would be to take funding, such as a small portion of ECS funding, and allow local districts to apply for funds to help ensure that every school can meet the recommended counselor-to-student ratios.

**Improving Student-School Counselor Ratios**

Connecticut should adopt the American School Counselor Association recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250 students per counselor. CSCA supports legislation that would improve school counseling ratios, particularly those in underserved areas and among students in elementary and middle school. This could be done through a phased in approach with grant dollars available for districts and a model comprehensive school counseling program that would be adopted by local school districts.

* Connecticut ranks 10th out of 12 states in the North Atlantic Region, with a student-to-counselor ratio of 481:1. While this is slightly better than the national average (491:1), it is nearly two times the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio of 250:1.
  + With approximately 1,400 school counselors employed in Connecticut’s public schools, including charter and magnet schools, only 11% (n=153) provide services to students in grades K – 6, and 28.5% (n=399) provide services to students in grades 7-8.

**Ensuring Classroom Safety through Promotion of Social Emotional Learning**

In 2018, the debate over classroom safety resulted in vetoed language around classroom safety. CSCA opposed the final legislation and has been closely following the work of the Department of Education and stakeholders on this issue.

* CSCA believes in safe and caring environments that are equitable for all students; this includes trauma-informed classrooms and the implementation of a research-based social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum.
* Through comprehensive programming, school counselors provide preventative services in areas of anti-bullying/harassment, violence prevention, cross-cultural competence, allyship, and conflict resolution in order to foster a positive school climate.
* School counselors believe in fostering healthy and trusting relationships, promoting positive student behavior and maintaining a safe environment through the use of restorative practices and positive behavioral supports and interventions.
* Through preventative services (and responsive when appropriate), school counselors provide social emotional supports for students through short-term individual counseling, small group counseling and classroom school counseling curriculum as well as through collaboration and consultation with staff and outside services.

***The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the organization in the state that promotes leadership and creates a professional school counseling identity. This is achieved by connecting, supporting, and empowering school counselors through professional learning and advocacy.***