



National Association for College Admission Counseling

Guiding the way to higher education

No Child Left Behind Act Reauthorization: 2007 Recommendations

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and its state and regional affiliates represent more than 20,000 college counseling and admission professionals nationwide. As educators dedicated to helping students make the transition to postsecondary education, NACAC members' leading policy priority is solving the college access crisis. In elementary and secondary education, two principles must be addressed to achieve this goal: (1) access to quality counseling on postsecondary preparation and (2) access to rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum for all students. Additionally, support for school counselors through professional development and inclusion of school counselors in school reform efforts is essential to improve student achievement and college access.

I. Improve access to school counselors for all students.

- Implement legislative proposal from NACAC to hire and provide training for school counselors, for the purpose of improving the postsecondary advising and preparation functions of school counseling program, and with the intention of (1) making sure every high school student has access to a school counselor; (2) reducing the student-to-counselor ratios in the neediest school districts; and (3) removing structural barriers that prevent school counselors from providing effective service to students.
- Implement legislative proposal from NACAC to provide materials and information on postsecondary academic and career opportunities to the neediest school districts.
- Augment the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP), to increase the authorization to \$75 million, and to make necessary changes to ensure program funds reach high schools.

Rationale

Research conducted by NACAC and in collaboration with our colleagues in the Pathways to College Network shows that access to quality school counseling has a significant impact on the academic achievement and postsecondary planning of all students, but especially low-income students. However, many students don't have access to a school counselor in the critical secondary school years when postsecondary planning must happen. Additionally, many quality counselors nationwide are overburdened with large student caseloads and non-counselor duties, both of which hinder their abilities to provide quality postsecondary advising. Funds from this grant program may be combined with an existing GEAR UP or TRIO grant to augment services in schools qualifying for those programs. Finally, counselors in underserved, low-income, rural and urban schools face a shortage of materials and information to provide students about postsecondary education.

The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP), the only federal program exclusively designed to provide funds to hire school counselors, has never been appropriated sufficient funds to allow high schools to receive grants to hire counselors. Additionally, ESSCP is focused on a broad range of student support services, and does not require funds to be applied to school counseling or postsecondary advising.

II. Fully integrate school counselors into No Child Left Behind.

- Preserve language in Title II that allows school counselors to receive professional development funding under NCLB.
- Involve school counselors in the annual review of AYP indicators, and other school reform efforts required under NCLB.

Rationale

No Child Left Behind does not fully integrate school counselors into accountability and school reform programs. Organizations like NACAC, Education Trust, and College Board and have advocated for a stronger counselor presence in the law's provisions. Research proves the positive impact school counselors have on academic achievement and postsecondary planning of students. Their participation in school reform efforts should therefore be encouraged.

III. Improve access to college preparatory curriculum for all students.

- Amend allowable uses of Title I funds to allow the neediest high schools to develop and support innovative approaches to improving curriculum, including dual enrollment or early college programs in partnerships with colleges and universities.
- Provide incentives to allow states to develop more equitable K-12 finance structures.
- Support state innovation in providing expanded curricular opportunities for all students, while maintaining flexibility and state autonomy in developing curriculum standards and content.

Rationale

Strong academics is a better predictor of college success than test scores, and is in fact a better predictor of bachelor's degree completion than any other factor (US Department of Education, 1999). Performance in college preparatory courses is the most important factor in admission decisions (NACAC, State of College Admission 2006). Currently low income and other underserved students lack access to rigorous curriculum and therefore are not as prepared for postsecondary education as their higher income counterparts. Although great improvements have been made in the college enrollment and graduation of low income and minority students over the last several decades, the gap between high and low income students in high school graduation, college enrollment, and completion has remained steady for 35 years. Access to rigorous curriculum for all students is the best way to expand access to higher education, increase postsecondary completion, and improve the quality of the workforce.